The Black Cat

September 1918

15 cents

Clever Short Stories

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SEE PAGE 2

Mother, Why Don't You Take Nuxated Iron

And Be Strong and Well And Have Nice Rosy Cheeks Instead of Being Nervous and Irritable All The Time and Looking So Haggard and Old?—The Doctor Gave Some to Susie Smith's Mother When She Was Worse Off Than You Are and Now She Looks Just Fine.

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The Black Cat

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For Readers and Writers

OBJECT OF CLUB

The object of the club is to stimulate interest in the study of and writing of short stories by reading, studying and criticising the stories in The Black Cat. First reading the magazine, then arranging the stories in the order of their merit and writing a short criticism of each one.

WHO MAY BELONG

The club is composed of readers of the Black Cat Magazine. To become a member it is only necessary to subscribe to the magazine for a year. Price is $1.50 which includes the Beautiful Rose Gold Good Luck Black Cat Club Emblem.

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Prizes amounting to $50 are offered to members for studying the stories and sending in Best Criticisms and getting new members for the Club.
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Criticisms must be received at the office of The Black Cat, Salem, Mass., on or before the 20th of the month following publication and prizes will be awarded and mailed as soon thereafter as possible and announced in the third issue following.

SUCCESS OF THE CLUB

depends upon the interest taken in it and each member is expected to get others to join. A prize of $10 will be awarded to the member who secures the largest number of new members each accompanied by one subscription.

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THE BLACK CAT CLUB, SALEM, MASS.

THE CUSTODY OF THE DOG

By CHART PITT

The world is so cluttered up with detail that an inheritance tax by any other name is likely to be overlooked.

HEN Wellington, the collie dog, limped up to the kitchen door, and found a red-headed woman in charge of his master's house, he knew that something had happened.

"Don't come sneaking around here, you gluttonous hound," the woman stormed as she brandished a broom in the dog's face. "The Old Man is dead, and it'll be a dark day before you find anybody else foolish enough to spend their money buying meat for a dog—money that ought to have been saved for the heirs."

The collie recoiled in horror. The loud-mouthed female didn't need to tell him that the master had gone upon that long journey of which he sometimes used to speak, as they sat together in the firelight.

There was the smell of death in the air. The wind, that rustled among the frost-yellowed leaves of the hickory trees, had dropped into a morbid lament, such a lament as only a dog could understand. Wellington lifted his nose to the blue Wisconsin skies, and voiced his grief in a shivering wail, after the fashion of his kind. But the wielder of the broom was upon him. Anger and fear had turned her into a raging fury.

The dog darted out of the gate and turned into the road that followed the twisting course of the river—the dreamy, muddy Wolf that his master had loved so well. Fear was too heavy upon him to admit of delay, but he turned his head for a backward glance as he ran.

It was hard to part from the gray, old building that had been his home since he could remember, but he had no hope of making anybody understand. There never had been but one man who understood dogs, and that man was dead, and Wellington, the collie, was denied the right to watch beside his body, a thing that had been the undisputed privilege of his kind since that morning in the early dawn of time when the first man and the first dog went out to share the perils of life together.

The red-headed woman was standing in the doorway, still clutching her broom like a club. Both hate and greed were plainly written upon her flaming, freckle-blotched face. Wellington had seen this creature upon several former occasions. Always she had come with a tale of woe to weep into his master's ear, and always she had gone away with money clutched in her grasping fist. It was Avaline Plunket, the dead man's daughter, a sister to the fleas that hopped about in the sand beneath the old house—hungry bloodsuckers all of them.

The dog's bitter reflections ended in a shock of collision, and a string of horrible, snarling oaths that gushed from the lips of a heavy-set man who was hurrying toward the house of death.

The collie leaped into the hazel-nut bushes that lined the river bank, and escaped. He had seen the fellow before—and knew what the toe of his number ten boot felt like. It was Amos Bland, a brother of the red headed broom-wielder. Like her's, his visits to the old house had been in quest of money.

Wellington circled back into the road, and trotted down into the straggling town of Fremont. The dog realized that he was homeless. There could be no such thing as going back to the old house, where the red-headed Avaline had taken charge.

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Fremont had been a town where people lived easily, and found dying about the only exciting thing that crept into their lives. It was a settlement of old timers and their children who had thrived upon a diet of petty gossip, with the spice of languid hate thrown in for a seasoning. But the coming of the button factory had changed all this.

The nondescript boats of the pearling-fleet jostled and crowded each other as they swung to the snubbing-lines in the gurgling current of the muddy river—the river where the lowly clam crept, sometimes with a fortune hiding within its unlovely shell. Old, broken-down river-runners dozed in the noonday sun, dreaming of the millions they would make on the morrow. Young men spent their hard earned dollars with what they thought to be reckless abandon.

Wellington knew it was useless to look for a friend in Fremont, where people who had dozed in the quiet content of stagnation, suddenly had been touched with a man-sized, primitive passion.

Never once did the dog look about him as he trotted through the town. His eyes were focussed upon the farms that dotted the lower valley of the Wolf. Out there the blue hills rolled away till they were lost in the soft, hazy skies of Wisconsin. There the corn was in the shock, and the rural folk were getting ready for the lone, bleak days to come. Somewhere in that land of flocks and herds there should be a place for a dog like him.

"There's the Old Man's dog now. He used to bring him down here every day for his beefsteak—and no cheap cut either."

Wellington glanced over his shoulder. Butcher Smith was standing in the door of his shop, talking to a young man. The stranger turned his head at the words. As he did so, a spirit of abysmal loneliness welled up in the heart of the outcast dog. It found its voice in a sobbing, throaty howl that went fluttering away into the unfriendly world.

For the face of the stranger was something that had no business being there in Fremont, or anywhere else, for that matter. It was the face of a man who had died long ago. The master had told him so. It was the face that had hung in its walnut frame above the fireplace in the old home from which he had been driven.

Wellington knew all about that boy who had gone away because of a misunderstanding with his father, and had been too proud to return. But the stranger was not a day older than the man of the picture, and Wellington knew that men as well as dogs grew old with the years.

"I wonder where he's going?" the stranger said.

"Suppose he knows something has happened to Grandfather?"

"I'll bet you the best steak I got in the shop that he's discovered your aunt Ava," the butcher grinned. "She's gone up and taken charge of things. I don't figure on getting rich off the meat *she* buys for Wellington."

The dog stretched out in the dusty street. His eyes still looked down the valley, where the farms were beginning to grow vague and shadowy under the gathering twilight. Something told him that he never would follow the white ribbon of the road, unless it was at the heels of this soft-voiced man who had called the dead master "Grandfather."

"Give him his usual piece of meat," the stranger said to Smith. "I never did own a dog—*until now*. Didn't feel I could afford to."

The collie turned his head away as he heard the footsteps approaching.

"Here's your supper, Wellington," the friendly voice said, close to the dog's ear. He turned and saw the stranger bending over him, a piece of juicy steak in his fingers. But it was something more than meat the dog craved. He glanced into the man's face—and saw the soul of the dead master shining out of the serious eyes.

Slowly the collie lifted his nose to the darkening skies, and sounded his sobbing call of grief.

"Don't feel so bad, old boy," the stranger soothed. "We can't bring your master back, but you're not going hungry. I can't feed you T-bone steaks like Grand-

father did, but we'll go fifty-fifty on the grub question."

"That dog will be just the thing you'll need, Doctor, if you locate in Fremont. You can leave him to watch the car while you're looking after your patients," the butcher suggested.

"There won't be any car," the stranger smiled sadly. "I'll have to walk."

Wellington followed his new friend to the hotel that stood at the foot of the bridge. He watched him enter the building, then trotted off to the stable, to find himself a bed in the hay.

The chattering of jays awoke him the next morning. The sun was rising above the distant meadows. All memory of his bereavement had been blotted out in the blackness of sleep. For a moment he pricked up his ears, hoping to hear the voice of his master. Then he remembered that the silver-haired man would never speak to him again. The master had gone upon the long journey, but no life except his would be left empty because of his going.

Only the young stranger seemed to understand what death meant to a dog—the tragic sorrow of the dumb, that must be borne in silence.

He went into the street and waited for the coming of his friend—the one man in Fremont who hadn't gone mad under the whip of the pearl-hunt. He hadn't long to wait. The doctor came down the steps, carrying a paper bag in his hand.

"I told you it would be fifty-fifty," he chuckled, as he spread a strange assortment of food before the collie. "I ordered steak instead of eggs, because I thought dogs might not like such things."

Wellington ate his breakfast, and together they started up the road, headed for the old house where a red-headed woman maintained her authority by the weight of a heavy broom.

Mrs. Plunket was waiting for them at the door. She greeted the doctor with a frozen smile.

"Paul Bland, you're a perfect picture of your dad when he was your age," she commented critically. "I don't see why the Old Man was so set on having you come to the funeral—after all he suffered because of your father," she sniffed.

Then her suspicious eyes caught sight of Wellington.

"Chase that dirty dog away," she ordered loftily. "The worthless brute has eaten up half of my inheritance already."

"He's going in to see Grandfather." The doctor spoke softly, and without a trace of emotion; but there was something in the even voice that thrilled the dog—something that sounded like the passionless ring of steel, hard tempered under the hammer of misfortune.

The red-haired woman went sniffing away in high-headed contempt.

"Perhaps the Old Man left you the hound-dog in his will," she spit out the words in spiteful bitterness. "I understand he left money for you to come to the funeral."

"I guess Grandfather had been keeping an eye on me, Aunt Ava, and knew I couldn't come without his help. I've just got out of college—and owe for my last year's tuition."

It was in the trembling arms of the doctor that the collie looked down into the cold, peaceful face of the dead master. Then silently they left the room.

Wellington waited in the yard for the doctor. When he came out of the house he carried a chain in his hand. It was snapped into the collar that circled the animal's neck, and he was fastened to one of the trees. Then the young man returned to the silent building.

Soon the people began to drift up from the town in automobiles, buggies, and on foot. They filled the house, and overflowed into the yard.

The sound of low, mournful singing came to him from within.

The sky had gone gray, and the wind held a touch of frost. It was a reminder that winter was creeping down across the northern forests—a reminder that a kind old man had gone out upon the long journey of death.

Soon the door of the farmhouse opened, and the crowd filed into the yard, two by two, their heads bared to the drift of the sharp edged breeze.

Wellington saw them carry the master past, in his somber, plush-covered casket and go winding up the road that led to the cemetery, where the marble monuments fringed the sky-line like a row of snarling teeth.

The collie felt the sting of his imprisonment. He had followed the master through sunshine and rain. Now they were leaving him behind.

In his bed among the fallen leaves he watched the far procession, watched until it came back down the hill; and the doctor hurried over and released him. The hand upon the chain trembled. Wellington looked up into the face that had grown old and gray, like the rest of the world.

The collie followed his new friend into the house. A handful of people from the village were scattered about the room. The red-headed Avaline and her surly brother were seated together at one side of the table. Across from them stood Lawyer Barber, with a paper in his hand.

"It was Mr. Bland's instructions that the will be opened and read in the presence of certain people. In deference to the dead man's wish, you have remained for that purpose."

Aunt Ava moved nervously in her seat as the lawyer unfolded the paper and hurriedly began to skim through the legal forms that preceded the specified bequests.

"To Paul Bland I leave the old, abandoned home on the river road—the place where his father was born."

Uncle Amos turned a smiling face toward the corner where the doctor stood; a white-throated collie dog stretched out at his feet.

Aunt Ava sniffed as though something was offensive to her delicate nostrils. Her chin was lifted high in hopeful toleration of the slow reading lawyer.

"My farm I leave to my son, Amos Bland, on condition that the stock and equipment be maintained at its present state of efficiency."

Uncle Amos settled down in his seat, his old, confidential bearing returned.

"To my daughter, Avaline," the lawyer continued with provoking deliberation, "I leave my town property consisting of four houses and lots on Back Street and one stone business block situated at the foot of the bridge, known as the Bland Block; on condition that they, too, be kept in repair."

Mr. Barber took off his glasses and began polishing them with a piece of buckskin. The red-headed woman seized upon the opportunity.

"I've been planning on having the Bland Block remodeled into a dwelling, everything modern and up to date. It's the best location in town. A person can't come across the bridge or go up Front Street without being in plain sight from the windows. I'll make it the show place of the Wolf. I ought to be able to get it fitted up in time to give a Christmas party —and I'll invite all you people," she added as she shot a smirking glance at the assembled witnesses.

Uncle Amos cleared his throat with noisy effort.

"I'm going to turn the old farm into a racing stable," he confided. "It's something this county has needed for a long time. I'll fix up ball-grounds and organize a team. If I don't put Fremont on the sport map my name ain't Amos Bland."

"But the money—and the mortgages—who gets them?" the red-headed woman became suddenly suspicious. "I'll need a lot of money to remodel the Bland Block."

"And I'll need my half of it to get the stables going," the brother flared in open warfare.

The lawyer was standing with the paper in his hand. Plainly he was waiting for the storm to blow over, before attempting to finish the reading of the will. The room grew silent. Suppressed breathing sounded loud and unreal in the strained hush.

"To each of the above mentioned heirs is given the right to use and enjoy the property severally alloted to them for the period of one year, at which time the entire estate will be disposed of according to instructions contained in the sealed codicil herewith attached."

"But the money?" The woman lifted her voice to unladylike proportions. "And what are the conditions?" Her question

was echoed by the wheezing, nasal tones of the man who had an ambition to put Fremont on the sport map.

"Mr. Bland thought it best that the conditions should remain unknown for the present. The moneys and securities are left in my care, subject to the last reading of the will," the lawyer smiled softly as he folded the paper.

Wellington trotted out of the room. The sound of voices rose in a sullen undertone behind him, voices that at times were drowned by the thin, whining complaint of Aunt Ava. Up the hill-road he trotted. The wrangling over the inheritance meant nothing to him. It was the dead man he wanted—not the raiment he had left behind him.

The scent-trail of the funeral party still clung to the dusty road, and over the grassy sward to where a fresh mound of red clay lay bleak and lone beneath the gray sky.

There on the trampled ground, Wellington stretched out in silent communion with the dead master, as was his ancient right.

The hours slipped by uncounted. A listless, murky twilight settled over the lonely hill, and with it came the doctor. Gently he lifted the dog's head, and led him away —into a new life, that in some strange way seemed to Wellington to be but the continuation of the old.

A YEAR slipped by. The boats of the pearling fleet still jostled one another in the muddy water of the Wolf. A few more of the old-time log-running rivermen had been carried up to the hill where the marble monuments fringed the skyline like a row of snarling teeth; and a few more clam-diggers had drifted into town and taken their places.

Fremont had not been placed upon the sport map. Neither had the Bland Block been remodeled into a residential castle from whose windows Avaline Plunket could sweep the length of the street with her prying eyes.

Yet it had been a wonderful year for Wellington, the white-throated collie dog. There had been no porterhouse steaks for his breakfast; but he had eaten his share of a doctor's lean rations, and never lost his faith in the man he had chosen as a friend.

Death had not dimmed his memory of the master who had gone; neither could hunger lessen his love for Paul Bland. Faith and poverty were the twin fibres of his soul—a blood trait that ran back to the lean, hard hills of Scotland.

He had trotted at the doctor's heels through winter snows and summer dust, as that serious young man walked the roads to minister to the sick and afflicted, sometimes a rich farmer from the valley, but more often a broken-down clam-digger in his shanty-boat up river.

Now the ducks were once more flying southward, clamoring their fear of the winter that was following fast upon their trail. Ever since daylight the boom of shot-guns had been drifting up from the sloughs and marshes of the Wolf. It had been a good season on the clam-beds, and Fremont was lounging in the lap of a lazy content.

Doctor Bland was the one exception. Prosperity had passed him by. His face looked more thin and drawn than usual as he came out of the little, storm-racked building on the river road, and reached a hand down in greeting to the dog.

"We've done the best we could, old boy," he whispered to the collie, "but there's one too many doctors in this town already. Somebody has got to move out—and I guess that's us. We're almost cleaned out, Wellington, but we'll get a piece of meat for our breakfast—the last one we'll ever eat in Fremont," he added.

At the turn of the road they met Lawyer Barber, the legal handy man of the Wolf.

"I was looking over my books this morning, and find the tax hasn't been paid on that dog. I'll have to order the Marshall to shoot him to-morrow, unless you come across with a dollar. That's the law, you know."

"Wait a minute." The doctor began emptying his pockets, counting the small coins they contained. "Here, take it all —a nickle won't buy anything in Fremont,"

he mumbled as he poured the chicken feed into the lawyer's hand, and received his tax receipt.

Then the man and dog returned to the old house on the river road—returned to a breakfast of cold potatoes.

"We might as well go up and watch Aunt Ava and Uncle Amos fight over their inheritance," he suggested to the collie as he shoved back from the table.

Time was nothing to the two unfortunates, and they squandered it lavishly upon that trip to the Bland Farm. They found the people waiting for them. Lawyer Barber unfolded a paper as he rose from his seat.

"We've waited a year to read this part of the will, as Mr. Bland wished," he began, only to be crowded out by the petulant voice of Aunt Ava.

"Yes, and it's been a wasted year, if you want to know what I think about it, fussing around with that *kudicle,* or whatever it is you call it. I never did have any time to waste on foreign words. Here I been setting around, waiting to fix over the Bland Block, and leather furniture getting higher every day. I reckon it'll cost me a thousand dollars extra to furnish the place. There's been a murder in town and two fires since then, and me setting up there on Back Street, and never knew a thing about them till everything was over. But I'll make up for it now. I'm going to start a newspaper in the back end of the Block. Mr. Plunket has been to Oshkosh learning to print, and I'll look after the reporting and editoring of it. A newspaper is the one thing Fremont has needed this long time. You just want to keep an eye on the editorials of the Plunket Weekly. There's them in this town that's going to feel the power of the press"

"You might boost my racing stables," Uncle Amos ventured gingerly, as though he was not fully decided whether to make use of his sister, or fight her.

"I'm going to run for sheriff next spring," he continued. "We might be able to help one another. I could put you on to a lot of official news—most everybody comes to court with their troubles—especially family rows."

Then Lawyer Barber rustled the paper violently to attract their attention, and began to read.

"'I, James Bland, being of sound mind, do hereby give and bequeath all my property, personal and real, to the party or parties unknown to me, who shall have provided a home for my dog, Wellington.'"

"That means me, I guess," Aunt Ava lied blithely. "I always fed him whenever he was at home. Of course the old fellow missed his master and was wandering around looking for him. All you people know that I took good care of him—don't you?"

"Av Plunket, you never gave a dog a bone in your life," Uncle Amos snarled at his sister. "Wellington went with the farm—he was part of the stock—I can bring a hundred people to prove he's been out here at the farm right along."

"I think the dead man has made provision for settling this thing peacefully." The lawyer once more rustled the paper, preparing to read.

"'In case of dispute and contending claims, the party who shall have paid the current dog-tax upon the animal, shall be considered as having complied with the provisions of this bequest.'"

"That makes it all right for me," Amos chuckled. "You made out the license to me, didn't you? You know we was talking about it just this morning."

"Me, too!" Aunt Ava thrust her thin, freckled face between the two men. "I didn't have the money with me, but I went home after it, and I met Mrs. Pots and she was a-telling how the minister was carrying on something scandalous with his housekeeper—and then I forgot all about the dog license."

Lawyer Barber folded up the paper, and placed it in Paul Bland's hand.

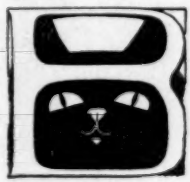
"I'm sorry, Mrs. Plunket; but you and your brother both had your chance—and didn't use it.

"Do you know what your nephew did when I told him about the tax? He turned his pockets wrong side out, hunting for enough money to satisfy the law—and he found it, too—one dollar and five cents—and he told me to *keep the change.*"

CHECK, 10 PAID

By GEORGE GILBERT

Danny Wilcox is thinking about something besides ballhead cabbage seed and the Morse code when he puts Olaf Jensen's message on the wire. Consequently Olaf is obliged to pay more than the usual price for cabbage seed, over one hundred per cent more.



AYSIDES," exclaimed Olaf Jensen, indicating the door by which he expected Dan Wilcox, operator at Brooksfjord, to get out, "Aye bane long tayme tryin' mayke up that Olga's mind she marry Sven Brudkolf! He has four big cabbage varms, much money by bank. You are yust tilligrafter and ban poor as a maus."

Dan grinned as a young fellow can afford to grin at the father of the girl who has given him the desired promise. With Olga's permission he had called at the general store of her father to inform him that he wished to become his son-in-law.

The grin irritated old Olaf.

"You bane keep rayte on a-goin' back to tilligraft offis, now, Vilcox. My Olga, she marry varmer who knows cabbage and brains has for business. On'erstand me dot?"

Dan grinned again and went out. And when he got back to the station he used the office telephone long enough to get Olga and tell her what had happened.

"Never you mind, Danny," came the reassuring message from the sunny-haired, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked daughter of old Olaf. "We are in America now, not Denmark," and so on. Fill out the details for yourself.

Old Olaf was the Boss of Brooksfjord, which was at the head of a good bay on Superior where the R. S. & G. branch line ended. Brooksfjord throve when cabbages throve and between the railroad and the bay, permitting cheap water carriage, the Brooksfjord cabbage kings and barons and dukes had cheap freight rates. The town was noted for cabbages, had been for decades. Old Olaf's general store was profitable and he, as president of the Brooksfjord National Bank, also financed the cabbage raisers, from seed to harvest; and between profits on money loaned and goods sold, waxed prosperous.

The next day after setting Dan in his proper place, Olaf was preparing his annual message. Unlike the President's annual message, Olaf's always consisted of ten words. It was meant to go by wire, to Dickinson's Seed Company, Chicago, ordering the Brooksfjord supply of Danish ballhead cabbage for the coming year. Olaf could as well have sent it by mail, but he held to the notion that sending it by wire was more impressive, more befitting a Cabbage Town King, and so by wire it always went, as soon as he had booked the last of the orders for cabbage seed for the new year and knew just what would be wanted. Then, allowing ten per cent for possible re-orders, he indited the fateful message. That was the usual ceremony and he was sure to use just ten words, so he would get the full value of his thirty cents paid for it.

This is the message he had framed in his mind, all ready to write down on a yellow blank:

"Send by express 50 pounds ball head cabbage seed."

Olaf always wrote "ball head" as two words. He never wrote it "ballhead" as some of the newer seed catalogues have it.

"Aye hold py de olt vays," he often said with pride, if one called his attention to his lack of change when others changed.

The message done he waddled down to the station to file it, and there he found Dan, smiling still, at receipt of custom be-

hind the barred wicket. Dan took the message, pouched the thirty cents, gave old Olaf a cheerful "thank you," and went over to the wire to call Duluth to start the fateful screed on its way toward "CH."

Old Olaf, well satisfied with his work, his seeming mastery over the smart operator, waddled back to his store again.

Duluth answered Dan's call and that long, agile, red-haired son of Uncle Sammy Morse made ready to snap the message to him. And, as he did so, Olga Jensen strolled by the bay window of the station where the instruments were and Dan—

Well, Dan, he had to take a look, and Olga, she smiled; and Dan, his hand still bobbing up and down over the key, by great effort, kept going. But his divided attention resulted in his wrist muscles twitching a wee bit on that extra long dash that represented the cipher in "50," splitting it in two; and Duluth got it "500 pounds," each figure on the wire counting as one word. As Dan had sent "ball head" as two words, as Olaf had written it, of course Duluth had eleven words in the message now.

Dan was still watching Olga's white teeth flash out of her smiling lips when Duluth clattered back:

"I make it 11 words, is ballhead one word?" Dan, his head full of something besides Morse, clicked back:

"Check 10 paid, yes."

Dan had sensed that the query had merely to do with the "check" or number of words in the body of the fateful message, and so had taken out, apparently, a word, which balanced the addition of the extra cipher when his wrist jerked in making the original blunder on the long dash or cipher.

And as the "yes" meant, to Duluth, that "ballhead" was one word, that fixed him O. K. and he set his "sine" to it and so it went to Chicago:

"Send by express 500 pounds ballhead cabbage seed."

And the check, to Duluth, was still "10 paid," despite the twin error of added cipher and jointure of ancient horticultural words.

As they say in the movies: "Five days pass."

Cabbage seed is pretty light and five hundred pounds of it takes up some space. At the end of the fifth day there appeared, on the Brooksfjord station platfrom, sundry well-made boxes, labelled:

"Olaf Jensen, General Store, Brooksfjord, Minn."

"Thar's a right smart of goods for you at the depot," Jed Terwilliger, the village truckman, yelled at Olaf, from the curb. "Five boxes o' cabbage seeds!"

"Five?" and Olaf waddled down to the station to look at the mountain of inchoate sauerkraut.

"Blaw-rumph!" he snorted, as he viewed the scene. "I refuse it. I order fifty, not five hundred." He stormed out.

Danny Wilcox, sure of his recollection of the context of Olaf's annual message, yet ransacked the recent files, found it, saw that Olaf was correct, was about to start the red tape rolling to place the blame, when he bethought himself of the man in Duluth, who worked the way wire. For years he had hammered away with that same man, knowing him only as "KX," and always finding him fair.

"Wouldn't be nice to saw off a valentine onto old KX that way," Danny soliloquized. "I'll give him a chance."

So he called Duluth, the wire being idle then, and stated the case.

"I remember that message and how funny you sputtered sending those figures," KX Morsed back. "I asked you if ballhead was one word and if it was a 10 worder, and you said: 'Check 10 paid, yes.' I took it that you meant only 10 words, with ballhead as one."

Danny, holding the key open, reflected. He remembered that KX once had taken the blame squarely for an error and knew him for a truth teller. He remembered, also, that when he should have been sending correct Morse, he was watching pretty Olga Jensen.

"Looks like it's up to me," he said. "What's cabbage worth, anyway?"

"Hold the wire and I'll rustle a paper and see," said KX. "Or I'll ask some of the boys on the market wires."

After he had told Danny, the Brooksfjord end of the way wire was open for several moments, then it closed and Danny Morsed back:

"I guess it's up to me, sure, old man. I'll make good on it and don't you worry. I'm stuck for fair, I guess, KX."

In due time return was made, through the proper channels, to Dickinson's, informing them that their customer, Olaf Jensen, refused to accept the shipment because of an operator's error which had resulted in ten times the original amount being sent. The operator at Brooksfjord was guilty and the railroad had asked him to make good, which he had done by taking the seed in return for a duly endorsed valentine, setting forth that he had made good. And so the five big boxes of ballhead cabbage seed remained, taking up one corner of the freight room at Brooksfjord, and Danny Wilcox went about with the same old smile on his face; and old Olaf, stubborn, went his way. He often told people in town that he had refused that shipment of seed and times would be hard next year because of the war, and cabbage seed would be worth nothing, and Dickinson's knew him and would send a new lot, fifty pounds, what he wanted—not five hundred pounds, that he did not want. At eighty-five cents a quarter pound he could not afford to pay for five hundred pounds of cabbage seed, no! Seed that cost $3.40 a pound could not be bought like oats or corn, no!

But as no new shipment of seed came, old Olaf became worried and one day wrote to Dickinson's as follows:

"Dear Sirs:—

Why no new order ballhead Danish cabbage seed to

Yours truly,

Olaf Jensen."

To which Dickinson's replied:

"Yours received and contents noted. Danish ballhead seed practically off the market. Can not send you any. Last quotation $2 a quarter pound pkg."

"Two dollars quarter package?" roared Olaf, at his fat clerk. The old man bolted for the station. He found Danny there, grinning.

"Aye bane want may cabbige seed," Olaf began.

"You've got none here," Danny gibed.

"Aye bane take it all," insisted Olaf.

"Not-a-thing-doing," said Danny.

"Alles mine," roared the old store keeper invading the freight room, with Danny at his heels. His face went blank. The big boxes were gone!

"Yes, Jensen," snapped Danny, "they're gone. When you refused them I made an inquiry by a friend in Duluth on the status quo of Danish ballhead seed and old KX got onto one of the produce market wires and found out that owing to the submarine campaign being specially directed at Danish ships, for Denmark's attempt to use her merchant fleet for trade with the Allies, all Danish stuff had gone over the top for big gains in price. While you were sulking and sleeping away, I shouldered the burden, accepted blame for the error, took over that lot of seed, with all my savings at eighty-five cents a quarter pound, or $1,700 in all. I sold the lot yesterday at $8 a pound, or $4,000.

Old Olaf's eyes bugged out, his jaw dropped. "But me, what bane Aye do, to fill my orders?" he wailed.

"I can get you fifty pounds at $8," said Danny cheerfully. "One lot hasn't gone yet. You can have it for eight—and bonus." He shoved aside some crates and there was one of the boxes, left.

"Aye take it," said Olaf, weakly. "Come to store, Aye pay thayre."

"You'll pay the $8 a pound at the store, but the bonus, man, I'll collect at your house—"

"Eggsplain—"

"By giving me permission to call on Olga. I guess a fellow that can put over a deal like this has got more brains than that Norsky that runs the four cabbage farms, hasn't he?"

"Fiv' hun'erd pound, at $3.40 pound, make $1,700; sold at $8 a pound, make $4000; you bane mayke $2300 on deal. Py golly, Danny Vilcox, you got head on you and not Danish ballhead, eider. Come up by may house this night and ve'll hav' kraut and pigs' knuckles and you spark Olga by der parlor, eh?"

APPLE PIE AND HIGH FINANCE

By ARTHUR LYNNE SIZEMORE

The Edwards Novelty Company, "Wholesalers and Retailers in Mail Order Goods of Supreme Merit," hires a stenographer. Although the selection is more a matter of interior decoration than utility, the investment pays in more ways than one.

JOHN Edwards should have been continuously happy if, as popularly supposed, there is more joy in anticipation than in realization. He had always anticipated one thing—the vague, shadowy mirage of success that is glorious when viewed from below. Looking forward to success in itself is the great national pastime, but to John Edwards, it had always been anticipation, never realization.

He was a failure. This fact did not have to be proved against him. He admitted it. As some rhetorician has ruled that there is no adjective particularly suitable for qualifying the word failure—such as "bad," for instance—let it merely be said that John Edwards was a self-confessed failure.

With all due respect for that rule of the game which upholds "the survival of the fittest," he still believed, without any misgivings whatsoever, that a good man cannot be kept down. Accordingly, he had accepted his consecutive failures in a manner that might have been called cheerful—or at least fatalistic, which embraces the belief that what *is* to be, *will* be.

John Edwards' numerous failures in business were through no apparent fault of his own. He possessed "oodles" of "pep." It exuded with every move of his lithe body. Personality was his also, and magnetism radiated from him like fragrance from corned beef and cabbage. That this simile may not seem out of place or sufficiently descriptive, let it be known that John Edwards was of the proletariate. He had started life very poor and had held his own.

Of the various channels of business into which he had thrust his versatile oar, there numbered round a half dozen or so failures; some, of course, were more pronounced than others, but the less severe were far from being successes. In his stormy career the shipwrecks of his business crafts were caused from as many reasons in each case as the total number of ventures. He often laughingly told his friends that he had been innoculated with the desire for success, but it did not "take," and that if he ever stopped to pick up a pin for luck, he invariably dropped his watch.

Of all these things he mused at he sat at a desk in his latest private office. The outer door bore a sign in readymade, gold leaf letters (which had been attached by a traveling Bluebeard at twenty-five cents per letter): "THE EDWARDS NOVELTY COMPANY." Coatless, collarless, with shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows, he was engaged in figuring his losses for the month. Letterheads, envelopes, booklets, folders and other descriptive sales literature scattered promiscuously throughout the office all announced the firm name, more or less appropriately sub-titled, *"Wholesalers and Retailers in Mail Order Goods of Supreme Merit."*

"Jimmy," he called to some unseen individual in the outer hall who, judging by the noise, was giving an impersonation of a skeleton having a fit on a tin roof.

"That's me," replied the grinning lad, poking his head through the door.

"Have you been monkeying with this infernal typewriter again?"

"No, sir," denied Jimmy hastily, as if he had been expecting the question.

"Well, it's in bad shape. Guess I'll have to take it over and get another to use

while this one's being fixed. If anyone calls, I'll be back in a few minutes."

At the offices of the typewriter company, he encountered the usual amount of delay and red tape, but finally secured a substitute machine which was placed at one of the many typewriter desks along one side of the salesroom for his further inspection and trial. His system of two-fingered typing properly brought out the good qualities of the machine and he rested for a moment. At adjacent desks were seated a few stenographers, patiently awaiting offers of positions supplied through the firm's free employment bureau. A casual and uninitiated observer might have presumed that a gigantic political campaign was being inaugurated, if the waste basket propaganda could be credited. Each basket was piled high with scrap paper, ninety-five per cent of which bore the bromide:

"Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

A girl directly in front of him, meantime, occupied most of Edwards' attention. He had caught a glimpse of her profile before he entered the railed enclosure and had mentally tabulated it as enchanting. Now he could only see her back, but he patiently waited. Finally she paused for a moment and gazed from the window, offering him another opportunity for a look at the adorable profile.

"None of that 'Haven't I met you before?' stuff would go with her," he mused to himself.

To his casual inquiry a few minutes later, the attendant who had waited on him informed Edwards that he did not know who the young lady was. No, she had never secured a position through the bureau. Yes, she was probably seeking one. (Pause.) Would he mind asking her? Certainly not. The clerk approached the girl and after an interval, beckoned to Edwards.

"Miss Hope, Mr. Edwards," announced the clerk and withdrew. The girl eyed him impersonally.

"The position I have to offer won't pay you much at the start," began Edwards, handing her his card, "but there will be opportunities for advancement."

"Just what is the work?" she asked glancing at the card.

"Why—er—in a way, it will be a sort of secretaryship, just a little routine work, correspondence and so on. I have been doing my own typing, but it's getting too strenuous," he explained with a flush mentioning the salary involved.

She hesitated a moment and he began to fear that the offer was insufficient; but she accepted before he could increase the amount. He escorted her to the entrance to the National Building and the elevator catapulted them to the sixteenth floor where they got out. Edwards ushered her into the private office, installed the new machine and then initiated the new stenographer into the intricacies and mysteries of the mail order business—or as much as he knew of it: follow-up correspondence, enclosures, advertisement keying, checking, recording of replies, results and general procedure in her new duties.

Within a week Margaret knew every item, article of stock, advertising medium and particular of the Edwards Novelty Company. Her duties had gradually broadened until it was she who totalled the daily sales; it was her keen eye that detected unprofitable advertising appropriations and her pencil that slashed the dubious investments. As Edwards admitted to himself, she took to the business like a duck to water.

"Did you ever eat duck eggs?" he asked her one day, apropos of nothing.

"Why, no, I don't think so. Are they good?" she asked, wondering what he was getting at.

"Just as good as hen eggs," he laughed.

"Why did you ask?"

"To make a point. Are you interested?"

"I'm curious, at least," she smiled.

"Well, then, here goes. I suppose you know that when a hen lays an egg she cackles."

She nodded.

"But a duck doesn't."

"No?"

"No. The hen advertises her eggs, but the duck doesn't—therefore the demand for hen eggs," he concluded triumphantly.

"And the point is—"

"This. I have some really good things here, but I'm only selling a few hundred dollars worth of goods where other firms are selling millions. My goods are needed just as badly, but, like the duck eggs, they are insufficiently and improperly advertised. Some merchandise is popularly supposed to be so meritorious that it speaks for itself; but I'm of the opinion that no matter how loud it speaks, a little outside gab rather helps the sales along. In other words, I believe in interrupting the self-praise of the merchandise with some bombastic talk of my own. That's why every cent I can lay my hands on goes into advertising."

"Who writes your ads?" she countered.

"Some of them are the product of my own facile pencil while others are evolved by my advertising agents."

"And they are men," she finished for him. "Your catalogue features all household articles—goods that are usually purchased by the housewife. Don't you think a woman understands the needs of a woman better than a man and that she could get a personal note into your ads where a man would fail?"

"You're right, Miss Hope," he admitted, "though I never thought of it before. 'The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under their skins.' A feminine ad writer ought intuitively to know how to appeal to women and touch their vanities and pocket-books. Can you write advertising?"

"No, but I know a woman who can."

"Get her," he ordered. "We'll give your theory a trial. Thank you for the suggestion. It's a sensible idea and right to the point."

"May I suggest something else?" she asked, with a flush at the compliment.

"Certainly."

"Did it ever occur to you that there would be more prestige in a better firm name?"

"Well, I guess 'Edwards Novelty Company' *is* a bit commonplace."

"I was just thinking—" she hesitated in some confusion, half regretting that she had broached the subject.

"Yes?" he encouraged.

"There isn't another mail order firm in this building. Why not 'The National Corporation?'"

"Great!" he exclaimed.

"You see," she continued with increasing enthusiasm and confidence, "with 'The National Corporation, National Building,' it would appear as a big firm; in fact, that the building was the exclusive property of 'The National Corporation.' You might even use a photo of the building on your letterheads, sales literature and so on. Other firms do it—why not you?"

He rose and walked over to her desk, eyeing her in mock severity.

"Miss Margaret Hope, I'm beginning to believe that you know a whole lot more than I about business and high finance on the sixteenth floor. That's a wonderful idea and I'm going to use it."

He paused for a moment and toyed with a pencil, a frown of perplexity gradually deepening his brow.

"If we use 'corporation,' we'll have to incorporate and I don't see how we can do that. The laws of this state are as strict as the deuce—cash capital must be carried. No matter how small the amount for which we might incorporate, I don't see how I can tie up any money in capitalization right now."

"I thought of that, too," she agreed. "Why not take a charter in some other state? It would only cost twenty-five dollars or so, and the capitalization may be as large as desired—a million if you wish. For instance, with a South Dakota charter the only expense besides your initial application fee would be an advance salary of about ten dollars per year for a dummy director who must reside in that state. In case the corporation prospers like the little acorn of fame, you can issue stock, keeping for yourself, of course, a controlling majority of shares."

He considered this for a moment, jotted down some random figures and finally looked up in relief.

"Done! I'm going to do that very thing. Business is nearly always built on bluff at the beginning anyway, so we might as well bluff our way through. Where do you get all these ideas on efficiency, business strategy and high finance?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, I'm from a family of business men and they talk shop all the time," she explained.

As a result of the conversation, there blossomed forth "The National Corporation, National Building, Chicago." It was incorporated for fifty thousand dollars. Edwards ordered some new catalogues, folders and circulars, all boldly emblazoned with the new name and address, with a very realistic photographic reproduction of the substantial National Building adorning each piece of sales literature. Business increased steadily and he was soon forced to lease larger storage facilities.

"Do you know, this should really be 'The Hope Corporation?'" he laughed one day as they were going over some new publicity literature together. "Business is actually improving, and all through your suggestions. Why, until you came into this office I hadn't had a decent sale since Bryan drew a Washington paycheck. Now our ads are pulling better, sales are coming along about as fast as we can handle them; our prestige is growing—and it's all your fault. I'm afraid you're destined to be a fixture here, Miss Hope."

"I'm glad my suggestions proved worth while," she returned modestly, "but it took courage for me to offer them."

He turned his attention to the large stack of mail she had just placed on his desk. One letter in particular held his attention and after reading it through several times, he stared from the window with a frown, finally pacing the floor several times, and at last pausing in front of her desk. His lips were set in a thin, straight line and there was a worried look in his eyes.

"Guess we're in for it now," he began wearily. "It's sink or swim—one of the two, but not without a fight."

"What's wrong?" she asked, looking up quickly.

His jaw clicked determinedly as he faced her.

"It's that hound, Richards—he wants to repudiate his contract with us. You know, practically everything we have catalogued is from his plant and the goods have proved such good sellers that I contracted for his output for a year, with option for a renewal at the end of the contract."

"And now—"

"The Samuel G. Chandler Company got a line on our catalogue and tried by hook and crook to get to the fountain head—the real source of supply of these goods. They couldn't, so had to buy from me at jobbers' prices. This little wholesaling deal is profitable. However, Richards found out that Chandler was on the trail of his specialities and has been dickering with Chandler, who offered him a price midway between what I am paying Richards and what I am charging Chandler. It's just a case of hot competition in a game of freezeout."

"Will Richards dare break his contract?"

"He says in his letter that it's a case of necessity, on account of increasing costs in manufacturing and so on. You see, he's had cold feet until now, but Chandler is selling so much of the merchandise that Richards would like this extra profit that I'm making. It means ruin for me, because I'm depending upon my profits in wholesaling to carry me through in the retailing line as it grows."

"How about a breach of contract suit?" she asked.

He chewed his cigar savagely and gazed from the window before replying.

"The spirit is willing, but the pocketbook is weak," he returned in an effort at lightness. "I could beat Richards in court, but I can't afford to go to law right now. Almost every cent I have is tied up in merchandise and advertising. That crowd knows it, too. That's why Richards is taking a chance on breaking his contract and treating it as a mere scrap of paper."

He returned to his desk and pawed over a bunch of correspondence in increasing wrath. Selecting a few letters, he spread them out in front of her.

"Here's a flock of inquiries from the big stores and mail order houses regarding placing orders. Why, it will mean thousands if I can hold on and carry through this jobbing line—thousands, Miss Hope. Just within reach of my hand, too. But I guess if I had Aladdin's lamp I couldn't borrow a match to light it! I've

been sending out letters to the big buyers, as you know, and this line is the talk of the trade. Pretty soon I'd be due for an attack of writer's cramp from signing receipts for orders. As it is, perhaps I'll have to start smoking Robinson Crusoe cigars," he finished with a laugh.

"What kind?"

"Castaways."

"How much would it take to pull through?" she asked briskly.

"Enough to bluff Richards, that's all. He knows I'm pressed right now. I could file suit against him for a few paltry dollars, but it wouldn't scare him unless I could convince him that I was able to hold out to the finish."

"Five thousand?" she persisted.

He laughed.

"Five thousand? If I had that much at one time, I'd defy anyone—but I haven't."

"Why not let the National Corporation supply it?" she suggested.

"This is no joking matter," he grinned. "We can't assess the stockholders—there ain't no such animals."

"Haven't you authority to issue stock?"

He rummaged through another stack of miscellaneous papers and extracted a bulky envelope bearing a return address, "Secretary of State, Pierre, South Dakota."

"There's our charter and all the fixings," he commented drily, laying the papers on her desk. "We have the privilege of issuing fifty thousand shares of stock, par value, one dollar per share—a clothes-wringer free with each purchase."

"Clothes wringer?" she asked vaguely.

"For extracting the surplus water," he chuckled. "Who'd want to buy the stock anyway?"

"Somebody might," she said. "The stock would be valuable in a year's time if you could hang on, wouldn't it?"

"Would it? I'll say it would—and then some. But we still have an 'if' to contend with."

"May I have these papers for the night?" she asked, indicating the charter certificate and other documents. "I have a plan."

"Sure—go ahead. You're a wonder at cheering a fellow—honestly. But what's the plan? Tell me."

"Later," she flung after her as she stepped into the hallway.

She entered the office the following morning in her usual quiet way, deposited her wraps in the small closet adjoining the private office and then softly closed the door leading to the reception room. Edwards curiously watched her every movement. From her handbag she extracted a crisp slip of paper and laid it in front of him, stepped back to her own desk and hurriedly attacked her machine. He glanced at the slip casually and then gave it a closer look. Brushing imaginary cobwebs from his eyes, he inspected the slip a third time and then leaped from his chair as though he had discovered hitherto unknown athletic ability.

"What—what's this?" he shouted.

"What does it look like?" she teased.

"But—but—it's a check from Samuel G. Chandler for five thousand dollars as application and payment for stock in the National Corporation."

"Yes."

"From—Samuel—G.—Chandler!" he reiterated slowly. "But, great guns, he should have been anxious to see me go under. It would have been the means of his getting in right with Richards."

"Perhaps he was," she ventured demurely.

Edwards seated himself on a corner of her desk and lifted her face so that she was compelled to look directly into his own puzzled eyes.

"Now, Margaret—Miss Hope—no teasing. Explain."

"There really isn't much to explain," she replied. "I've another surprise, too—and you'll actually think I'm taking everything into my own hands, I'm afraid. The other shock is this—I obtained an option on Richards' plant for four thousand dollars. That includes patents, stock and machinery—dirt cheap."

"Dirt cheap? Rather!" he repeated in amazement. "Ten thousand would have been cheap. How did you do it?"

"I knew Richards was also pressed for money. He's an inveterate gambler and in debt pretty bad. My brother told me that, so I took my cue from it."

"But—this check?"

"Well, I next took our charter and the option to Samuel G. Chandler and hinted to him that he'd better get in right with the National Corporation, who were taking over the Richards patents and goods that the Chandler firm needs. In a slangy way, I might say that the whole thing was a case of 'bluff,' as you call it."

"I can't understand your particular brand of bluff, though. It must be out of the ordinary. Richards had a paying proposition; but of course if he's in the hole pretty bad, that explains his jumping at the chance to get out from under. How did you convince him that it was to his interest to sell out?"

"Desperate cases require desperate remedies," she evaded, "and all is fair in business and war."

"I always thought that last epigram mentioned something about love," he ventured, reaching for her hand. She withdrew it hastily and eyed him in reproach.

"We were talking of—oh, yes, you wanted to know how I convinced Mr. Richards that he ought to sell out. Well, I confided in him that I had good reason to believe—in fact, was positive—that Chandler was going to back the National Corporation!"

"Good Scott! That's robbing Peter to pay Paul—with a vengeance." Edwards exclaimed in admiration. "But—Chandler? He's almost unapproachable. How did you get an audience with him?"

"Easy," she affirmed with a twinkle. "You know, he's something of a gormand. He buys medicine for his appetite and then eats so much he buys more medicine for indigestion. He's an epicure when it comes to apple pie—a connoisseur of that particular pastry."

"Apple pie?" quizzed Edwards.

She picked up her handbag from the edge of the desk and extracted an engraved calling card which she handed to him. It read, *"Margaret Hope Chandler."*

"You see," she concluded, "he likes the way I make them, and I can just wind him round my little finger after he's enjoyed a comfortable dinner."

Things were happening entirely too fast for John Edwards, ex-failure. He gazed at the five thousand dollar check, then at the option, next at the explanatory calling card and lastly—and far from unwillingly—at the girl.

"Why did you use just 'Margaret Hope' in your profession?" he commenced lamely.

"Dad didn't want me to go to work, so I assured him I wouldn't drag his name into it. It wasn't *very* much of a fib to give that as my whole name, was it?"

"No-o-o," he replied, taking her hands into custody, "but I wished for something when I knew you just as Margaret Hope that may be too high to reach for now."

"What do you—"

"I mean I've always wanted you, Margaret Hope—since the day I first discovered you in the typewriter shop and hired you when I had no more use for a stenographer than a rabbit has for Sunday. I even had to borrow the money to pay your first week's salary, my little partner in bluff. I couldn't say it before, things were so uncertain, but now—well, aren't you going to meet me half way?"

"I really believe," she blushed, looking at him accusingly, "you wouldn't have said it without discovering I could make apple pie!"

"Gee!" soliloquized Jimmy an hour later, "the boss and s'nographer looked funny as they went out. One side of his nose was powdered and one side of hers wasn't!"

NEXT month: THE JUNGLE MAN *by H. P. Holt,* an adventure story with a South American setting.

T'OTHER DEAR CHARMER

By ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

Picking out a wife for Cousin George is a task that requires special training and a great deal of finesse. We will say this for Auntie Miller, the Civil Service Commission itself couldn't be more thorough in outlining the requirements or examining the candidates.

IF I have any favorites among relatives it is my nephew George. There is only six years difference in our ages—and I trust this may be regarded as a truthful statement—George's mother being a half sister of mine who was married when I was a mere child. That wedding, my first, I recall vividly: my sister in her Ashes of Roses wedding gown of cashmere, all shirred and puckered and fluted; my childish expectation that a lightning change would take place at the conclusion of the ceremony; my disappointment at its close when I turned to the assembled company and observed audibly, "Why, they look just the same!"

How many times in the old days did George and I rob birds' nests together or, perchance, shoo setting hens off their eggs, or slide down forbidden stair rails. Ah, the halcyon time of youth! Would that our happiness could even now be measured by a pair of oak banisters!

All of which is apropos of the time I helped George out of a dilemma in which he found himself in love with two dear charmers, and unable to decide between them, the odds being even. It goes without saying that both girls were in love with George. In fact, many a feminine heart in Westerville skipped a beat when George returned from the study of law at Ann Arbor, hung out the proverbial shingle and proceeded to set society by the ears. Matters had reached a critical stage when he strolled in one evening and enlisted my co-operation.

"Esteemed and venerable Aunt," said he, with the engaging smile with which he was wont to gain his ends, "I am in the dickens of a muddle. And what's more, I can't see my way out. I find myself hopelessly in love—is that draught too much for your rheumatism, Aunt?"

I threw a cushion at him which he dodged. Laughing, he proceeded:

"Yes, hopelessly in love with two of Westerville's fairest daughters, as our local sheet would say. And for the life of me I can't decide which one to propose to. Now, knowing your sagacity and ability in straightening out love affairs, I invoke you aid and, incidentally, your blessing."

"I am glad to learn," I observed dryly, "that the candidates have been narrowed down to two. A week ago they numbered half a dozen. I am afraid I can't take your case, George. You are too fickle. I wash my hands of you."

"Now, Aunt," he wheedled, "need I remind you of the time I saved you from a whipping when you tried to set the family cat on a setting of Buff Orpington eggs? Neither will I basely refer to the times without number—shan't I get a shawl for your shoulders, Auntie?—that I have refrained from giving out the secret of your age. Nevertheless, you will not have forgotten these things and I count on you to help me decide between Bab and Ellice."

"Of the two evils," I advised, "choose the lesser. I can't decide for you. They are both pretty and charming. Haven't you any choice at all?"

"Not so you could notice it," said George gloomily. "Of course Ellice has the prettier name. Ellice Bellair—isn't it a pippin? I'm as much in love with it as with the owner."

"Is it as bad as all that, George?" I murmured.

But George ignored the thrust.

"Now take Bab," said he. "She's as cute as a bug's ear, but there's her name—Bab Pickler. With my name it is too alliterative. Imagine a possible son and heir going through life with the cognomen, 'Pickler Pinkerton!'"

"George Henry Pinkerton," I remarked severely, "I am shocked. Your imagination puts you in the professional dime novel class. I advise you to go to the city directory to look for a helpmeet."

"Now, Aunt," smiled George, "laying joking aside, you must help me decide between these two girls. I'm crazy about both of them. They're two girls in a thousand. Really, I didn't expect to find their like in Westerville."

"We *are* somewhat backwoodsy," I remarked, a little nettled, "though we have domesticated our mastodons and buffaloes, and discarded our blankets—"

"A truce!" broke in George, laughing. "Aunt, will you or will you not pick the winner?"

"Oh, the egotism of men!" I mourned. "Are you sure both girls love you?"

"Can you doubt it?" he grinned, his hand on his heart.

"You were always in love with somebody or other," I mused. "There was little Ardis Bower—you and she used to be boy and girl sweethearts. Have you forgotten how dippy you used to be about her?"

"Where is Ardis?" he asked indifferently. "I have hardly thought of her in all these years except as growing up coarse and tanned and—er—well, uncultured. The Bowers were disgracefully poor, I remember."

"Poor but respectable," I corrected, "to quote our old school readers. They were fine folks, Georgie. I'm afraid you've absorbed a lot of snippy, mushroom ideas at Ann Arbor along with your law."

"Fair Aunt," he apologized, "I crave your indulgence."

He was really so handsome and had been so spoiled by feminine favor that I could not blame him for his conceit. A few adoring women can turn a man's head completely.

"Ardis," I resumed, "is teaching now—tutoring French, I believe."

"So?" he said indifferently. "I doubt if I'd know her."

I sighed for the errant fancy of man. Once, I remembered, George had frozen his ears on her account.

"What is it you wish me to do about these two charmers?" I asked. "I should think your own heart would tell you which one you love best."

"'How happy could I be with either,'" he quoted, "'Were t'other dear charmer away.' That's the rub, Aunt. When I'm with Bab I'm sure she's the one and when I'm with Ellice I feel as if the noose were already about my neck."

"Well," I scolded, "you shouldn't vacillate this way. It is said matches are made in Heaven. I knew right away the minute I laid eyes on Henry that he was the man for me."

"Right you are," grinned Henry entering suddenly. "And take it from me, George, I never had a ghost of a chance from that moment. 'Pity the sorrows of a poor, old man.'"

George laughed.

"Condolences are in order," said he. "Here I am losing flesh over the vexed question of deciding between two charmers."

"Ellice and Bab?" inquired Henry. "I met them on my way home. I tell you, George, the little one is fair to look upon."

"H'm, Bab," murmured George. "Sometimes I think she's a bit too scrawny. Take Ellice now—"

"Ellice!" broke in Henry. "Why, she can't hold a candle to Bab. Ellice is like a statue. It wouldn't take me long to decide between those two girls, old man."

"I'm going to leave it to Nell," said George. "Trust a woman to find out about a woman's points, good, bad or indifferent. On Nell's judgment I rest my case. If that fails it will be heads or tails for yours truly."

With which romantic disposition of his love affair, George took his departure.

I assure you that I didn't leave a stone unturned to help George to a decision. I cultivated Bab and Ellice exclusively. I invited them to the house, took them shopping and to matinees, and even ran into

their homes at unceremonious hours, but at the end of a fortnight, I was as much in the dark as before. There was absolutely no choice between these rival charmers. Both were well bred, cultured, bright. Both were sweet in their different ways, as to disposition.

Neither was I able to find either one at a disadvantage. If I ran in to see Ellice unexpectedly, I never found her in curl papers or a dingy wrapper. Once I prevailed on Bab to try on boots when we were shopping, and though she demurred, her silken hose were guiltless of holes. It began to look as if I should have to give up and let George toss pennies. At this critical juncture, it was Henry who came to the rescue with the sometimes surprising logic of men.

"Ellice," said he, "reminds me of our friend Nerissa. She is too cold. I can't imagine her in a domestic role. Can you, for instance, Nell, picture her dandling a baby and singing lullabies?"

Could I? It was an inspiration.

"Now take Bab," he continued. "Can't you just see her laying out a man's slippers, filling his pipe, chopping up his kindling, and cooing over a cradle—"

"There's where you miss it," I broke in. "Bab detests babies. She doesn't try to disguise it."

"Purely affectation," declared Henry. "She's maternal to the core. Why, I've seen her kiss an Airedale pup."

I bestowed on Henry a coldly pitying glance, the while I inwardly exulted. Here was the test. I had seen enough of non-domestic women to know that I didn't want George in the toils of one. Here was my cue. I would put the charmers to the test with a vengeance. But how? Plan after plan flitted through my mind only to be dismissed as impractical.

Then it was that I bethought me of George's married sister, Polly, and her darling of a baby. My mind was made up. I would enlist Polly in the cause. But the whole thing involved strategic care. How was I to get George and the cherub, Polly and the two charmers together, with me in the role of stage director, hidden in the wings? However, I finally smoothed away obstacle after obstacle. Even Henry admitted that my plan was Napoleonic.

It was one of the loveliest of May mornings that George set out, in the language of the novelists, to meet his fate. I had telephoned him that I wanted him to gather up Ellice and Bab in his car and meet me in front of Payne's department store. I intimated that I would get Henry and we would all take luncheon together at Morton's. I then 'phoned Polly and told her that if she would dance at George's wedding, she must insist that George call for her and the cherub and take them down town on the plea that her car was out of order.

"But," demurred Polly over the 'phone, "George will think it strange if I take the baby. I never do, you know."

"Nonsense," said I. "Let him think you're taking him to get his picture or to see the doctor. Be sure to say that you only want him to take you down; that Tom will see you home."

"All right," she giggled, and hung up.

When George drew up in front of Payne's with a flourish, with Ellice and Bab modishly attired in the back seat I was stationed behind a showcase of shoes in the entrance, and taking great care not to be observed. It was eleven-thirty and the streets were crowded as they always are toward the noon hour. From my vantage point I watched Polly handing the cherub over to George's protesting arms.

"Here, take it," he protested, very red in the face. "The thing is preposterous. What do you take me for—a perambulator?"

"I'll be only a minute," laughed Polly, backing away. "I just have to get a spool of thread."

"Fine," I whispered as she passed me. "There's a bargain sale of cut glass on the first floor back. A word to the wise."

"Very well," she laughed, and was soon swallowed up in the crowd.

I glanced toward the car. George, the picture of despair, was holding the cherub at arm's length. With one hand he clutched the back of its neck, with the other, its tiny ankles. Calmly I awaited the dénouement. It was not long in coming. The

cherub was frightened and he protested with vigorous howls.

It certainly was an embarassing moment. I saw Ellice and Bab exchange angry glances. In desperation George flung the cherub over his shoulder like a sack of flour. As the howls increased in volume, a crowd gathered.

"Here, here!" cried George in what was intended to be a soothing tone. "Cut it out, old top!"

He looked out despairingly over the sea of faces. Among them he detected various cronies who leered understandingly. It was plain that George would not soon hear the last of this episode.

I'll confess I was getting rather nervous. I really had expected one of the girls to come to the rescue, but this they evidently did not intend to do. Ellice gazed stonily out over the crowd. Bab, her face suffused, shrank back into a corner of the seat.

"Godfrey!" gasped George, turning imploringly to the girls. "Can't you do something? Won't you take him?"

Bab shrugged angrily.

"You're no gentleman, Mr. Pinkerton," she cried, "or you'd make him behave. Why don't you spank him?"

"Suppose you try it," snapped George.

Ellice leaned forward suddenly and fumbled at the door.

"I—I will get its mother," she murmured confusedly.

Bab followed suit, while the crowd laughed and a wag near me muttered commiseratingly: "'The wicked flee when no man pursueth.'"

I felt that it was time to intervene, and was moving toward the car when there was a sudden lull caused by the cherub holding his breath, and a voice from the crowd yelled succintly:

"Try him with a lullaby!"

Acting upon this suggestion, George trotted the cherub on his knee at the same time singing stridently:

"'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!'"

But to no avail. Above the din rose cries of "Paregoric," "Mellin's Food," "Safety First," "Tickle him in the ribs!"

I pressed forward. Poor George was wiping the perspiration from his face. An elderly gentleman ahead of me, approached the car and bawled out confidentially:

"Try chucking him under the chin and saying, 'Chin-chopper, chin-chopper!'"

George eyed him with a vacant stare and, aiming a blow on the point of the cherub's chin, began chanting vacuously, "Chin-chopper—chin-chopper," when all at once the gaping crowd parted and a slim figure darted to the side of the car. I craned my neck in amazement. It wasn't Polly. Could it be Bab or Ellice?

"Let me take the baby," I heard her say, and, as she turned her face toward me, I saw that it was Ardis—Ardis Bower. Gently she lifted the cherub, now quite purple in the face, and, with a deft and gentle touch, smoothed its rumpled clothes. Then, crooning, softly, she pressed its roseleaf cheek against her own. There was magic in the touch. The cherub stopped crying and gurgled ecstatically against her neck.

"Are you an angel," gasped George, "or an animal trainer, to attack that wild cat single handed? Why—why—is it you, Ardis?"

"Eight years make changes," laughed the girl, "but I knew you right off, George. Where have you been keeping yourself? You have not been over to see me at all."

I had always considered Ardis a pretty girl, but looking at her now I didn't wonder that George was so dumfounded. She was what Henry would have called a raving, tearing beauty. George's words came over me as I gazed at the chic little figure with its unmistakable air of elegance and refinement. "Coarse, tanned, uncultured." I almost laughed aloud, especially since George continued to gaze, his mouth agape.

"I suppose," observed Ardis, demurely, making what is commonly known as goo-goo eyes at the cherub, "that that is the manner of salutation in Ann Arbor."

"The latest," said George, evidently recovering himself with an effort. "I have had a shock," he continued, grinning. "I was expecting to find a little sun-browned girl, and here I find a divinity."

Just then Polly came out, wearing a properly apologetic air.

"Thank you, George," said she, sweetly. "I'll take him now, and go into the tea room where Tom will meet me. How was the little lamb?"

"If that was my kid," growled George viciously, "I'd skin him alive. I was about to wring his neck when Ardis came to the rescue."

"How dear of Ardis," laughed Polly. She gave me a quizzical glance. "I see that the quarry has fled," said she, in an aside.

Ardis had turned to go.

"Don't go," begged George eagerly. "You must dine with me—and Nell and Henry."

"But," demurred Ardis, "I have a French class at one-thirty."

"I will get you there on the stroke," promised George, already leading the way.

And presently we were seated at a little round table where I obligingly studied the menu card and appeared to be oblivious to the unmistakable romance unfolding before me. In the old days we three had played together. I could shut my eyes and recall the little playhouse with its carpet of green moss, and its acorn cups and saucers. There had been a whole colony of dolls with me as grandmother, by virtue of my added years, and Ardis and George—

I looked up suddenly. There was that in George's eyes that I had never seen before. Beholding him thus, I knew that the winged dart had struck him squarely. No need to ask my assistance now to help him decide which girl to marry. I knew that there would never be—had never been—another girl in the world for George save Ardis Bower.

"Ardis," he was saying softly, "isn't it strange that in all my wanderings I've never considered you as grown up at all. Somehow, I have gathered a lot of foolish, unworthy ideas. I won't keep it from you, Ardis—I have tried to forget you, the memory of you. I have been an insufferable, pig-headed, conceited—"

Ardis raised a protesting little hand, but George went on inexorably:

"And I thought that you would be an ignorant little country girl with no education—"

"Why George,"—Ardis was blushing adorably—"don't you suppose I knew what you thought when you didn't write and did not come? But I fancied that I could reclaim you unless you were too far gone"—she smiled demurely—"so I went to college and specialized in French, and I even went abroad—"

"Ardis," murmured George, so low that even I could hardly hear, and I am accounted fairly good at hearing, "I love you—never mind old Nell. Let her hear if she wants to. She's listened to so many proposals we can't shock her. Don't cut in, Aunt; I fancy you know more than you let on about this affair. As I was saying, Ardis, I have always loved you"—he leaned closer and took her little gloved hand. "Subconsciously I have thought of you in all these years in that sweet relation—no Ardis, I won't look at the head waiter if he is grinning behind his napkin. And I won't let go this hand until you say you'll marry me. Will you, sweetheart?"

"Very well," said she dimpling, "I'll consider it. At least, I will be a sister to you." Her merry glance fell before his ardent eyes. "There has never," she murmured very low, "been anyone in the world for me but you, George."

It is well that Henry entered just then, or I don't think that Ardis or the head waiter or I could have restrained George from taking her in his arms.

Henry bowed admiringly to Ardis and seated himself with a comprehensive smile.

"I gather," said he, "that your experiment was successful. But what about t'other dear charmers?"

"As candidates," I told him briefly, "their names are withdrawn. Fate took a hand in this little affair, also."

All this happened two years ago, and I must say in justice to George that he has become fairly proficient in the art of baby tending. However, with the usual fickleness of man, his allegiance is now divided between Ardis and another dear charmer to whom he occasionally sings in melodious, not to say raucous tones:

"'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!'"

THE INSURING OF MRS. HARRIGAN

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Mrs. Harrigan is not a first class risk for an insurance company, nor for a soap grease factory, for that matter; but Mr. Harrigan insists upon having her insured nevertheless.

IT was Fenwick's first trip in the employ of the Gotham and Glory Life Assurance Company. He had talked much, but business had not come his way. It requires an exceptionally good talker to interest a farmer in life assurance. Fenwick had just begun to realize this when he chanced to meet Maloney.

"It's no use wastin' yer breath on me," said that individual, "but I'll put you wise to some sure business."

Within Fenwick's breast Hope flared up and made him gasp. "Where?" he cried.

"Turn up by the lake and walk along by the pine woods till you strike Harrigan's place. Harrigan takes out a policy with every insurance man that comes his way."

Fenwick shut his bag with a snap and hurried up the long, hot and dusty road.

Harrigan was sitting before his open door when the insurance agent approached. The farmer was a thin, consumptive-looking man, with the weary look of the confirmed pessimist. Fenwick summed him up as an easy victim, and with much confidence he unloosed his opening speech.

Harrigan listened patiently. "Is it the biggest and best company in the world?" he asked languidly.

"Certainly," cried Fenwick. "We have five hundred and eleven millions in reserve. We paid out ninety-seven millions in claims last year. No humbugging with our society, sir. No trouble for the unfortunate widows and orphans." He unlocked his bag and pulled out a mass of insurance literature. "And the rates, Mr. Harrigan! Now, what will be your age at your next birthday?"

The farmer whittled a piece of pine and contemplated the little pile of chips.

"It wasn't myself I was thinking of," he said, dreamily.

"Wife, sir?" queried Fenwick briskly, sorting out his forms with nervous fingers. "What age is she, sir?"

Harrigan stood up and turned towards the door of the shack. "Come inside and we'll talk it over," he said.

The agent was jubilant. His fat face glowed with delight. His heart throbbed mightily as visions of a fat commission floated before his mind.

Harrigan motioned him to a broken-backed chair near the fire-place, while he perched himself on a stool between his visitor and the door. The farmer seemed to be pondering over some problem, and Fenwick, seeing that he was not listening to the remarks about the benefits of life assurance, stopped talking and waited for him to speak.

After a few minutes silence, Harrigan drew his stool closer and leaned forward.

"Wish you had turned up last week," he murmured.

"Better late than never," said Fenwick cheerily. "I'm in time if your good lady is—"

"That's just it," interrupted Harrigan moodily, *"she's dead."*

The agent's backbone seemed to lose its stiffening force, and his body sagged. The information startled him.

"I—I thought you wanted to insure her," he stammered.

"So I do," said Harrigan quietly.

Fenwick tried to smile, but fear smoothed out the wrinkles that mirth tried to create, and left his face white and ghastly. He thought of the two miles of dusty road that separated Harrigan from his nearest

neighbor, and the mournful sobbing of the pines tautened his nerves.

"But—but you cannot insure her," he spluttered, "it's impossible."

Harrigan reached forward and tapped him hard with a bony forefinger. "No one knows she's dead," he whispered.

The agent's throat became suddenly parched, and he breathed painfully. The weird song of the pines increased in volume.

Again the farmer leaned forward and tapped him impressively. A toil-battered hand pointed to a long box beneath the stretcher, and Fenwick shivered.

"She's in that," he murmured; "and I want you to insure her for a thousand dollars. Wait a moment and I'll show her to you."

The limp and perspiring agent glanced towards the door, but Harrigan read his thoughts. He reached forward and grasped Fenwick by the collar, and then, stooping down, kicked the lid off the long box. A figure wrapped in canvas lay inside it.

"Good Lord!" shrieked the insurance man. "Wha—what happened to her?"

"I fixed her with this axe," said Harrigan calmly. "She has been talking too much of late, an' I got tired of her tongue."

The agent showed symptoms of apoplexy. The chair creaked as his spineless body sank against the broken back.

"Come on, wake up," cried Harrigan irritably. "Get out your forms and your pen and ink, and we'll insure her. I'll give you two hundred dollars out of the deal when I get their check."

He let the head of the axe fall noisily upon the floor, and the agent came to life again.

"Yes, sir; oh, yes, sir, I will," he stammered. "Five thousand dollar policy? Yes, sir, certainly."

Harrigan juggled playfully with the axe, and the fountain pen travelled at full speed across the printed forms.

"Wha—what name, sir?" gasped Fenwick. "What is—er—what was the lady's name?"

"Mary Ann Harrigan, maiden name O'Brien," answered the farmer.

"Ah, yes. Ann Harrigan Mary, maiden name O'Ryan," mumbled the nervous agent. "Wha—what age will she be next birthday?"

Harrigan looked puzzled. He balanced his axe in his hand and contemplated the ceiling.

"Guess she won't have one," he said slowly.

Fenwick stopped writing. "We must put in what age she—she will be next b—b—birthday," he gurgled.

"Very good," said Harrigan, "I'll see what age she was last birthday. It's entered in this 'History of the Revolution.'"

He moved across the room to consult the worn volume that lay upon the mantleshelf, and the agent saw an opportunity to escape. With a bound he cleared the stool that blocked his path to the door, dashed down the green patch before the house and, springing over the low stone wall, fled at top speed, leaving proposal forms, fountain pen, and handgrip on Harrigan's table. A shout came down the wind, and a stone whizzed past him, and his short legs ate up the dusty road at a terrific gait.

An hour afterwards, Fenwick, with clothes all torn and splashed, breathlessly related the story of the murder of Mrs. Harrigan to the policeman in the nearest town, and when he had finished the officer propped himself against the saloon and laughed till the tears raced down his cheeks.

"Have ye run all the way?" asked he.

Fenwick snapped out an affirmative. The other's mirth annoyed him.

"Well, that's a durned shame," grinned the officer. "You're a fat man and you may be troubled with heart disease. I'll have to be speaking to Harrigan, or he'll be killing one of you fellers yet. You're the sixth insurance man that he has played the trick on this last month. That's a dummy stuffed with wool that he has in the box. He never had a wife, to my knowledge."

And again the Law propped itself against the saloon to ease the merriment bubbling within, while the representative of the Gotham and Glory Life Assurance Company hurried down the street.

THE HAUNTED OAK

By ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE

An historical episode, involving the safety of the family plate and the honor of the faithful old Negro who saves it from the invader and then forgets where he put it.

ENERAL William Tecumseh Sherman has much to do with this story; indeed, he is the real author; for if he had not marched so perilously close to the Rivers plantation, certain incidents would not have occurred. The faithful Negroes would never have ransacked the house so frantically and carried off so much furniture into places of safety. But particularly the Rivers family silver and the great tea service of gold, which had been presented in Revolutionary days to Randolph Rivers by the colony he had so conspicuously served, would never have been concealed with such fatal security. In the graves behind Sherman's march, bodies were buried; but stranger were the things buried in the graves that were hastily digged in front of the invading army's advance.

The Rivers family was absent when the plantation was menaced with the invasion of the Northern army. All the men were at the front. Roxane Rivers and her daughter were in Charleston. They had come down from the plantation some weeks before, and they had left orders that, if any peril approached, Old Jason was to direct the disposal of the valuables of the house. Old Jason was the dusky autocrat who ruled all things and all people in the Plantation home, even the Rivers family itself, every member of which was willing to defer to the wise old Negro's judgment on certain matters. When a friend in the city asked Roxane Rivers how she could leave her home in the country open, she replied that with Old Jason there it was safer than if she herself were there, for he would take much better care of everything than she could. For all things belonging to the Rivers family, Old Jason's was a jealous love; and of its apprehending ear and penetrating eye all the other Negroes stood in awe. Not one of them would have dared to sleep in the Great House at night; but Old Jason slept there at night and stayed there all day, a faithful guardian of his master's possessions.

But when strange, wild rumors, such as war alone can bring, began to travel up into the peaceful plantation regions; when some of the younger Negroes began to leave the places and to straggle off to follow the alluring wake of the victorious army; and when, distinctly borne on the western wind, came the dull throb of distant firing, Old Jason knew that the crisis had come. He therefore sent for twelve of the strongest Negroes, apportioned to each some valuables of which they were to take charge, and dispatched them into the gloomy recesses of Spencer's Swamp, a vast and melancholy woodland wilderness that bordered the Rivers' lands. This strange procession made its way slowly down the sandy road and out of the plantation gateway. There were some astonishing feats done in that march. Tall Samson, true to his name, gathered to himself the huge mahogany sideboard and bore it off with amazing ease; Jehu carried the stately andirons from the fireplace of the ballroom, and they glinted in the sun as far as eye could follow him; Tony bore away five great mirrors that shot dazzling beams of reflected sunlight from the fields to the crests of the pines and back again; Esau, the plantation "hunterman," was appropriately charged with the care of the guns and pistols in the house, and he was loaded down with old duelling-pieces and silver-chased English fowling guns.

It was not until the last of these Negroes had disappeared into the forest that Old Jason, with trembling hands, took the huge iron key that he kept hidden on his person and opened the deep closet where, he knew, the family silver and the gorgeous gold tea service were kept. In the shadowy recesses they glimmered from the shelves. Hanging near by were silk cases, some of which had come with the set; others, Jason's mistress, with the patient skill of a woman's hands of the old days, had made. The Negro knew every piece of silver and gold, and he knew in which bag each one belonged. Had it not been his especial pride for almost a lifetime to rub them with chamois skin until they glowed in the shade or glittered in the sunlight?

Gently now he lifted down each piece with a care that only fidelity can bestow. The smaller ones he took first, until he felt sure of himself. Then followed the massy pieces, solid and marvelously chased. Each was slipped carefully into its bag. No one knew so well as Old Jason how to do this. Roxane Rivers had often said that in forty years he had never dented a piece of silver. Nor did the old man dent one piece now, although he was alone and excited, and the greatest responsibility of his life was upon him.

He had brought to the closet a large sack full of rice straw. This he emptied on the floor of the closet. Now, as each piece of silver or gold was slipped into its silk case, Old Jason placed it gently in the big sack, packing about it snugly soft layers of the straw that he crushed in his strong hands. At length the task was done. The ancient servitor felt far back on each shelf, but there was nothing more. The large sack was nearly full. Old Jason tied it up; then he backed out of the closet, locked the door, shouldered the heavy sack gingerly, and made his way stealthily out of the house. He had sent all the other Negroes toward Spencer's Swamp; when he reached the foot of the steps, he started in exactly the opposite direction.

In not meeting a soul in the course that he had taken, Old Jason succeeded in carrying out the first part of his plan. And when once he had passed through the shrubbery and across the pasture field, entering forthwith a primeval wood, he knew that he would not be followed. Of this he was positive; for he had determined to secrete the Rivers' treasure in the Negro burying ground, into the mournful beauty of whose shades he had now come. No one on the whole plantation would follow him into that dread abode; and nothing but love and utter faithfulness ever induced Old Jason so to master his natural aversions to such a region as to enter it himself.

In the gloomy fastness of that sanctuary, nearer the rice fields than the road, there stood a great live oak; a vast tree whose huge, tolerant limbs spread far out over the sweet-smelling jungles of myrtle and jasmine vines. It was more than a century old, and the gray moss that draped its limbs with melancholy grace enhanced its ancient and venerable appearance. So stately was the tree that about it brooded a spirit, and this spirit seemed to interpret the mystery and the awfulness of the woodland graveyard.

In this oak, near the ground, was a huge hollow; and there was no Negro on the Rivers plantation who did not believe, and who did not derive a certain fearsome pleasure from his belief, that it was the home of a graveyard "hant." Now, to the Negro mind, a hant is not merely a spirit or a ghost; it is a ghost, a fiend, a loup-garou, all in one. In that word is conjured all the terrors of night, of silence, and of the grave. So it was that this oak, whose presence was known by every one within miles of the plantation, was seldom looked upon, even from afar, by human eyes. When there were 'coon and possum hunts at night, and the dogs happened to take a trail toward the great oak, the dusky hunters would pause, turn aside, and if peculiarly sensitive, would consider it an opportune time to go home. Once in the distant past a dog which had trailed toward the oak had not returned; but no Negro would believe the plausible thing—that he had been caught by an alligator in the rice fields—but insisted that a "hant" had made way with the unfortunate creature. Even at times of funerals, when

large groups of Negroes would enter the dread sanctuary, they avoided approaching the haunted oak; and the glances which they cast in its direction through the woodland were wary and furtive. Once when one of these solemn processions had inadvertently headed for the oak, it had, upon perceiving its fatal course, retraced its steps with too much speed for dignity.

To this ancient tree Old Jason now bore his treasure. As he went deeper and deeper into the thickets approaching the oak, he began to talk to himself, knowing well that no human ear could hear him. Moreover, the sound of his voice broke the ghostly stillness suspended eerily about him, giving him a sense of human reassurance.

"I is safe now," he said, meaning that his treasure was safe, as he felt anything but safe. "This is the grabeyaad. I done do the thing I was to do. Thank God for that! I'se so glad that the silber and the gole is safe. I have every piece in this sack—yes, sah. And when Ole Missis done come home, I jest have to say, 'Yes, Ma'am; yes, Miss Roxane, I done hide it safe till Mr. Sherman done gone on his way 'bout his business. I done hide it all in the hant oak in the grabeyaad.'"

Old Jason had now come to the mighty tree, towering portentously. Cautiously he slipped the sack from his shoulder until it rested softly on the ground. Leaving it there, he began to examine the hollow. It was at a convenient height above the ground, and the aperture was sufficiently large to admit the sack. Mastering his trepidation, Jason thrust his hand in; he could feel the bottom of the hollow. Though the thought had little to do with his errand, he reasoned that if the hollow were really the abode of a hant, the fearsome creature was not at home. Old Jason found the hollow dry, and the soft, rotten wood yielded to his touch. It seemed an ideal place in which his precious burden might repose. Jason turned, lifted the sack, slip it into the hollow, and settled it tenderly into its place. It rested well below the aperture; no one not actually looking into the hollow would see it; and there was no one left in that part of the country, save Old Jason himself, who would dare to look into that haunted place.

His task completed, the ancient Negro made his way by another route out of the burying ground. At some distance from the oak he turned into a path, which led him at length to a road that skirted the cemetery. Jason reached this with a sigh of relief; for now if any one saw him, there could be no suspicion attached to his walking in an open, pineland road. On his old face was a glow of happiness as he turned in the direction of the plantation gateway. He would return now to the Great House, there to await whatever dangers might come, until the return of the family he had so faithfully served. But he felt, with thanksgiving in his heart, that his greatest danger was past, the possibility of the loss of the treasure intrusted to his keeping.

Old Jason had almost reached the gateway, beyond which the plantation home glimmered beneath its live oaks, when he was aware of soft foot-falls in the sandy roadway behind him. He turned quickly, to face two young Negroes. Jason knew them; they were from another plantation down the coast. And his first glance at them gave him the feeling that they were away from home for no good reason. This suspicion became certainty when the two newcomers spoke to him. They assumed an air of nonchalant friendliness that Old Jason knew to be feigned. He realized that they, like all others of their kind, were aware of his position of responsibility, and that therefore they would not follow him and stop him on the plantation road unless they had business with him. And what business save that of a sinister nature could these wanderers have with him? Yet Jason granted them guardedly the benefit of a huge doubt.

"You boys is a long way from home," he said gravely. "Is you gwine spend the night to the settlement?"

"Maybe," said the older man evasively, "but we got a little business on hand first, Uncle Jason."

Old Jason felt his heart begin to throb. Had they seen him emerge from the burying-ground? If so, could they have guessed

his mission there? The two Negroes drew up very close to the old plantation servitor. The ancient regime was face to face with the new and the strange and the lawless.

"You say we is a long way from home," the younger Negro said in an insinuating voice, "but we ain't got no home. You is free. We is free. And all that did belong to others, we can take it now, 'caze we is free."

Old Jason understood what was meant. This kind of talk, he dimly surmised, must be the fruit of war and of sudden emancipation. He experienced a feeling of anger that these two upstarts should attempt to try any new doctrines on him, especially such doctrines. He had been an autocrat too long to hear with any feeling but one of hatred and scorn the wild ideas of adjusted relationships that a too sudden and violent democracy brings abortively forth. Jason did not withhold his feelings.

"If you ain't got no home," he said, "that is because you won't work. And if you think anything on this Rivers place belongs to you," he added with rising indignation, "you better change your mind. You is free," he went on with trenchant emphasis, "but you ain't free to steal."

With this Old Jason turned toward the gateway. He had no time to spend on such men and he meant his actions to show it. But as he turned, the younger of the two Negroes stepped quickly forward and placed himself between Jason and the gate. The older man moved up to close in on the old servant.

"Now, Uncle Jason," one said, "there ain't no hurry for you to go. Is you gwine kill yourself working for the white folks? 'Sides, we ain't done with this little business yet."

"What you want?" asked Jason abruptly and with resentful heat.

"We want what you done hide," said the older Negro. "These white folks," he added depreciatingly, his eye falling before Jason's stern one, "ain't neber coming back nohow. We will neber see them no more."

"Where is you gwine that you will neber see them no more?" asked Old Jason with fine sarcasm. But the Negroes were not in the least touched by this. They felt, perhaps, that they were abreast of the times, whereas Old Jason could never be brought to understand and to take advantage of new conditions. But they felt that he and what he stood for and what he had secreted in the woods were now in their power. By a concert of action they sidled up to the old Negro, each one taking him by an arm.

"We ain't gwine to hurt you," said the younger in his whining voice, "but you is to lead us to where the white folks valu'bles is. You know the way," he added, stepping forward down the road and bringing Old Jason with him.

There was a brief struggle. Jason freed his right arm and struck one of his assailants, who, with a sinister swiftness, whipped a heavy pistol from his bosom, clubbed it, and dealt the old Negro a vicious blow on the back of the head. Jason's knees quavered. His eyes opened wide, then closed; his hands clenched convulsively. He sank to the ground and lay still.

"You done kill the ole grandpa," said the older Negro. The two looked furtively about. Their eyes dwelt for a guilty moment on the unconscious Jason. Then silently, fearfully, they slunk off into the deep woods, leaving the Rivers' champion prone in the plantation road.

It was quite dark when Old Jason recovered consciousness. He was sadly bewildered, seeming to be able to recall nothing. All recollection of his late encounter had passed from him; he could not remember how he happened to be there in the twilight by the gateway. But he knew well enough who he was, and that his post of duty was at the Great House. The nature of his fidelity was such that his first movement was in the direction of the Rivers home.

It was only after a long and bewildered struggle that Old Jason reached the house; and there he went to sleep in the small back room that had been apportioned to him. He lapsed into sleep's unconscious state without being aware that a deeper unconsciousness had come over his memory.

His awakening on the morrow was an awakening to his old duties; and he went about the house as usual, assiduously busy about the same tasks that had engaged his strength and his faithfulness every day for forty years.

During the days that succeeded, cheering news came from the west. The great army had passed northward, leaving the melancholy, blackened ruins of many stately homes, but passing untouched the Rivers plantation. Old Jason began to feel that it would be safe to have his henchmen bring from the swamp the hidden pieces of furniture. Indeed, he had fully made up his mind to it one day, when the sun shone brightly and peacefully, and when there seemed to be in the atmosphere no hint of the receding alarms of war. But as Jason was about to start for the Negro settlement to carry through his plan, he saw a carriage driving up through the avenue. His heart almost stopped beating for the moment, for he imagined it might be General Sherman himself, of whose personality Old Jason had conjured a fearsome image. But as it drew up to the steps, from it alighted Roxane Rivers, whom the old Negro welcomed with an affectionate gladness that was ample proof of how he had kept the faith.

"I knew you would be here to meet me, Jason," she said, "you have never failed us. You are always at your post of duty.... No Roman soldier was ever more faithful," she added to herself as the loyal old servant with reverent pride bowed her into the house. "Is everyone safe, Jason?" she asked.

"Yes, Ma'am; yes, Miss Roxane; and everything you give me to keep is same how you leff him. We done heared the shootin' but nobody done come this side. I know, Ma'am, 'caze I been here all the time."

On entering the dining room, the appraising eye of the mistress fell on the vacant spaces whence the massive pieces of furniture had been taken. Jason quickly explained. "I wuz gwine to have them brought back to-day," he added, "when I done see your carriage comin' up the avenue."

Roxane Rivers was so eager to restore the order and the arrangement of the home that she dispatched Old Jason immediately to the settlement to have the other Negroes bring in the furniture. In an hour's time the order had been executed, and through the plantation gateway entered a strange procession. It looked like moving day, a funeral, and a returning picnic party all in one. And it was with amusement and astonishment and pride that Roxane Rivers viewed the approaching multitude. Her pride was due to the fact that some Negroes, who had always been considered the most shiftless and unreliable, the very ones she might have expectced to be into mischief, were now doing their share. She saw the crafty Tall Samson bearing, as if in triumph, the massy sideboard. And there was Jehu, laboring with the huge andirons. Tom and Tony, two former incorrigibles, were manfully bringing in the great divan belonging in the livingroom. Along the fringes of the procession were little children, running excitedly and laughing at the efforts of their elders.

In due time all the furniture had been replaced; and then followed a dinner in the big plantation kitchen for the workers. Only Old Jason was absent. He was reporting in detail on the things which had been taken from the house, checking off those that had been returned. At last Roxane Rivers asked him about the family silver and the gold tea service.

"Of course you looked after those yourself, Jason," she said. "I know you wouldn't have let any one else touch them."

Jason looked curiously puzzled, and he shook his gray head slowly. "No, Ma'am," he answered, "I didn't take the silber and the gole. The silber and the gole," he repeated musingly, "they must be in the closet, same how they always been."

Together they went to the closet door. There the ancient servitor produced the massive key, turned it in the lock, and held the door wide for the mistress of the plantation to enter. The sun was sloping westward, and certain dim beams of it shone palely into the dark recess. Roxane Rivers

stepped forward and looked about. She had had no premonition that anything was wrong; her faith in Jason would never have permitted it. But her surprise swiftly became fear as she viewed the empty closet, felt vainly on the shelves, and saw that even the silk cases were gone from their places along the wall.

"Why, Jason," she said, "there is nothing here."

The old Negro shuffled forward, a look of incredulity on his face.

"Ain't here, Miss Roxane? But he must be here. I done shine him last week. I done—"

"But haven't you had the key all the time, Jason?"

"Miss Roxane," he answered, "you know I wouldn't 'low nobody to touch that key. No, sah," he added mutteringly, "that is my key, and I have it by me day and night."

"But the silver, and the beautiful service set—don't you know where they are, Jason? Surely you must have taken them out and hidden them in some safer place.

A strange light came into Old Jason's eyes. He seemed to be gazing upon a scene that was no longer visible. But then, not without a struggle on Jason's part to keep it alive, the light faded.

"I don't 'member," the old man said, brokenly, pitifully. "Miss Roxane, the gole and the silber been here, but I don't know where he is now. I don't 'member." And to all her queries, Old Jason had but one sad and inconclusive rejoinder: "I don't 'member."

The days passed into weeks, and these weeks into months. Slowly the work of the plantation adjusted itself to the new and strange conditions. Few Negroes had left the Rivers place, and those who did so were of a restless and uncertain sort. Though Roxane Rivers could not escape the haunting thought that Old Jason knew of the hiding place of the lost treasure, she ceased to question him on the matter, and she retained him in his high position of trust and honor. Indirectly, when the loss of the silver would be felt on those regular days when the old Negro had been want to clean it, the question of its fate arose. But always the pathetic "I don't 'member" closed the question.

The time approached when the men of the Rivers family turned their faces homeward; one, indeed, would not return; but his mother felt a solemn pride in the sacrifice which he had made of himself and that she made of him. Hers was a just pride, too, in the fact that the old plantation home would be ready to welcome the soldiers back. There was hardly a thing gone. Nearly all the Negroes had been faithful. Old Jason—but there the haunting suspicion would return. If he had but kept his trust, what a record of fidelity would she have to show her husband and her sons! Yet she could not convince herself that the old servant had betrayed that trust.

One day the mistress of the plantation went down to the gateway to tie the gate open. There was no stock to wander in and out, and she wanted the gate wide when her men returned, which might be at any hour of the day or night. It was late in the afternoon; and, her task accomplished, she stood looking back at the Great House, dreaming in its shelter of oaks. Suddenly down the road she saw Old Jason coming. He was going home to the settlement. As he came up he paused with his hat in his hand.

"We must keep looking for them, Jason," she said, "for we must be found watching when they come. They will be as glad to see you as if you were one of the family, Jason. How I wish," she added musingly, "that we had not lost the silver, and the gold tea service..."

Old Jason looked back at the woods; then his gaze turned toward the house. His dim eyes welled with tears.

"Oh, Miss Roxane," he said tremulously, "if I could 'member,—if I only *could* 'member!"

A moment later he had passed on down the lonely road, shaking his head and muttering.

Roxane Rivers turned back thoughtfully toward the house; but a sudden call from the dusky road down which Jason had disappeared arrested her steps. She paused to listen. She heard the cry repeated, and

she knew it to be one for help. Though fully aware of the danger she might be facing, she hurried in the direction whence the cry had come.

In the shadowy road not far from the gateway she came in sight of two forms bending over someone prostrate in the road. On her approach these two rushed away into the darkening woods. The fear that guilt alone can give was upon them. But Old Jason lay as he had fallen. He was lying at a peculiar angle, and his body looked crumpled.

Kneeling beside him in the twilight road, Roxane Rivers spoke to him, chafed his rough old hands, laid her hand over his heart, to feel but a faint beating there. But her voice roused him. His eyes looked into hers; and the light therein was the peace that passeth understanding.

"Miss Roxane"—the words came feebly and slowly, yet with a great hushed gladness—"I done hide it in the hant oak. I done 'member now. Them men you see jest now, they done fight me once before to make me tell them where I hide it. I 'member it all now. We been in a fight by the gate, and one hit me, here in my head, Miss Roxane, and I done forget everything. But this time, when they done jump on me at the same place, it all come back."

The old Negro's eyes closed; his body seemed to relax. But Roxane Rivers heard faintly, as if from a voice in another land and life, "I 'member; I 'member."

By the haunted oak in the burying ground on the Rivers plantation is a grave surrounded by a little iron railing. And the brief inscription on the plain white stone is a part of the heritage of the Rivers family. It reads: "Jason: Faithful unto death." And to that humble grave generations yet unborn of the Rivers family shall go in reverence.

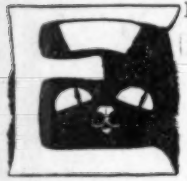
FOR OCTOBER: SHADRAC AND THE FIERY FURNACE, another story by the author of THE HAUNTED OAK. The superintendent of a cotton-seed oil mill gets out of bed at two o'clock of a rainy morning to argue with a pugnacious job hunter. Two weeks later he receives another early morning call.

OSKALOOSA'S ALIEN *by Jerome Beatty,* also scheduled for October, is the story of the awakening of a pacifist who insists upon working for a German even after he is told that the German sneers at the Red Cross, laughs at our army, and retains a picture of the Kaiser in his sitting room.

REFORM MEANDERS

By JOSEPHINE SESNAN CRONIN

To the acting Auditor, the ways of the reform administration are past understanding, until he learns that to be a successful reformer one must be a politician, knowing all the tricks of the trade and keeping a poker face to the front.



LLIOT Bond, big, blond, boyish, followed the Commissioner into the office of the Auditing Division at a pace so leisurely that it might have been interpreted as diffident. The man's whole physical aspect, however, routed any such ambushing conclusion on the part of the office force. He was clean cut as a diamond, straight of glance, unwaveringly sure in movement.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Bond, who will take charge in the absence of the Auditor. Give him your help." The Commissioner patted Bond approvingly on the shoulder and went out.

An habitual preliminary to serious thought or speech, Bond slowly stroked the back of his head with his left hand.

"We are to work with one another during the coming weeks. Let's work together. That will make going smoother and easier." His roving survey of the men met fear, tentative trust, covert opposition, dumb resignation, hesitation, cringing—all the varying shades of emotion that a score of different sets of human organisms can express. Bond's glance touched the first desk last. In the agreeable face back of it he encountered amused defiance. He walked over, his hand extended:

"You here, Wendel! Funny, I don't remember ever having heard what your business connections were, and I didn't dream of running across you like this."

Bond detected a shade of commiseration in Wendel's "Well, Bond!"

When he had passed out of the room to seek the Correspondence Division, the men left their document piled and artfully strewn desks, gathered in twos and threes to discuss the outlook under the new order. There were faces exultant, faces fighting gloom, faces downright despairing—the customary reflection of post-election days.

Two rooms down the hall Bond came to the door marked "Correspondence."

The Department Correspondent, engaged in sorting the morning mail, glanced up. She bent on Bond a smile that flashed happy surprise, which at once ran to cover. She stepped lightly forward.

"Miss Brent, too!"

"Just one of her, Mr. Bond."

Bond laughed with frank joyousness as Miss Brent gave him her hand in greeting: "The 'too' means that after I am a bit staggered to find Phil Wendel in the Auditor's Division, I come upon you here."

"You haven't really troubled very much to know where we were, now have you?" There was just a perceptible accusing sting in her banter.

Again Bond laughed and flushed slightly. "I have been away from things, consider, for two full years. Back four months, I am becoming acquainted with old friends all over again. You of course know that Wendel and I were at high school together. After leaving I had seen him only once until we met at Green Mount. And now—once more." As if accounting for his presence, for Bond's selection had not been forecast, although his activities for the Non-Partisans had received much publicity: "The Commissioner has asked me to act as Auditor for a time, and my first official business is to come to you for aid to send out a few lines quickly."

"You shall have our very best efforts." Miss Brent assigned a stenographer to

Bond and returned to the task his entrance had interrupted.

Bond looked after her with a knitting of the brows. There was a tincture of acid in her raillery. Her mock-serious air seemed to him like un ugly mask on the younger Marcella Brent.

Had Bond a beforehand knowledge of the personnel of the City Works Department, he would have considered long before consenting to become a bureau head even temporarily.

He still had smarting memories of the eventful day two years before when he had leaped to a decision favoring an offer to install modern business methods in a long established Middle West firm. He had gone up to Green Mount for a brief rest. There he had met Marcella Brent, who was recovering from a serious illness. At once Bond had been drawn to Marcella, and Marcella had not seemed loath to accept his attentions. Together they had tramped, rowed, danced, and, more telling still, dream-talked the hours away. Then had arrived the brother to whom Marcella had several times made casual reference—Wendel. In the explanations that followed Bond learned that Marcella had been the ward of Wendel's mother and had lived with the mother and son from her childhood until the death of Mrs. Wendel, so that Wendel had colorable brotherly interests. Without delay he had taken pains to make evident to Bond his own priority of right to Marcella's society. Marcella had striven for an airy impartiality toward the men that might establish good will and a degree of camaraderie. But Phil was pointedly curt and aloof in his treatment of Bond.

A very small dose was effective. Bond went to his room and made an unblinking arraignment of the situation. It convinced him that Wendel's presence had revealed how deep an inroad Marcella had made in his own regard and tenderness. But Wendel and she had shared in the same home intimacies of their childhood, shared in the same mother love. What wonder if nearness had worked its customary spell for them? Very likely Bond himself had been to Marcella but an interlude. Forthwith he had sent his acceptance of the Middle West offer.

Now he had returned, only to thrust himself into the same situation.

Meantime Bond's sudden departure from Green Mount and his negligent silence were rankling afresh for Marcella.

On the side of business, Bond rather welcomed Wendel's silent challenge. It would give his problems zest. Bond possessed that streak of combativeness that every winning creature must have.

It was the hint of that attribute, as much as Bond's general likeableness, that attracted the Chairman of the Non-Partisans the first night Bond appeared at campaign headquarters. He had come up to the Chairman's desk, exuding straightforwardness and clean success. "Is there any job going begging around here evenings? It is not in my line—I'm an accountant—but I'd like to have a hand in sweeping the Ring out of town."

The Chairman was right in accepting Bond as an asset to the Non-Partisans. There was unmistakable evidence of his efforts and his influence. He gained the case for the Non-Partisans by his own personality, which voters gladly took as an omen of better things.

The election won, the Chairman fastened on Bond and would not be shaken off. "We need you, my boy. Grant is slated for Commissioner of City Works. Pick your job under him, and I know he'll give you a free hand. You'll find the whole department plastered with mold and hung with fifty-year cobwebs."

In spite of a disinclination for public service, the razing of a rotting structure, all chinks and decay, to set up in its stead one clean and modern, dovetailing in all its parts, called to him like a mission. Yet he pondered, irresolute, for he was promisingly placed.

"Remember, Bond, you've had a good share in putting the right crowd in, but it takes the work of men like you to keep them in." And the Chairman prevailed.

Bond was determined to move slowly in his new job, both out of consideration for the men, encrusted with old ways, and to insure his own mastery of the situation.

Yet even at the outset there must be some method, some order.

Soon after his taking hold, the office was one day clean of men at 12.30, while a litigant property owner raged as he waited for the return of a clerk to clear up a cloudy item of assessment. Thereupon Bond made out a noonday schedule so that such an incident should not recur; at least half the force was always to be on hand. The schedule, headed by Wendel's name among the 12 to 1 contingent, was posted conspicuously.

After the first brief verbal exchange of Bond and Wendel, the latter had adopted an imperturbable aloofness towards the new office head. Bond, for his part, refused to be provoked at any such subtlety of conduct. His attempt was to establish a footing of mutual respect and helpfulness.

Wendel, at the front of the room, was jerking his office coat over his right shoulder into place when the order caught his eye. Bond passed through while Wendel was reading. With a nod Wendel summoned to the bulletin board a clerk just returning. When the late-comer had finished reading and looked around, Wendel winked emphatically to let the other man know what compliance to expect from him.

The next day, at one, Wendel, with elaborate deliberation, washed his hands, slipped carefully into his street coat and walked out, the others watching him, all with admiration, each with some mingled sentiment. For in the past Wendel's pull had made him unpopular.

In mid-afternoon Bond passed Miss Brent in the hall and his first sensing that she had been touched with the corrosion of a scepticism, a cynicism, a bland insincerity was deepened. He questioned whether these negatives were not taking aim at himself.

Meantime the office force waited, though not for long. At the close of the day as Wendel was about to leave, Bond called him into his room. Bond's straight gaze met one of easy, self-confident assurance.

"Wendel, if you're fair I think you'll agree that I am not trying to lord it over you or any of the rest of the men. I am trying to better conditions as I see them, but as the acting head I must insist that my orders be recognized and carried out. Now, what's your excuse?"

Wendel, in his way, was as direct as Bond. "Twelve o'clock isn't convenient for me, that's all."

"Why not come and say so?"

"Well, I didn't!" And Wendel looked as satisfied as if he had applied his boot toe to Bond.

Bond turned abruptly to his desk. "We'll go into it again, Wendel, unless you have something further to say to me in the morning. Think it over well."

Bond honestly hoped that Wendel would come to him. He was able and, in spite of his swagger of secret influence and power, he attracted. Besides, though two years had passed without crystallizing events for Wendel and Marcella, Bond knew that Wendel still dangled, and he would have made a detour from the straight path of action rather than give Marcella a pang. At this pass, however, if Bond were to justify his job, Wendel must come forward or feel the prick of discipline.

Wendel neglected to see Bond in the morning. Perforce, Bond laid the situation before the Commissioner. He was surprised to find he had been forestalled. He was amazed almost to open-mouthedness when the Commissioner, with his habitual pat on the shoulder, counseled: "You must not be too drastic in this case, Bond. Put the best face on it you can and get over it somehow for the present."

Bond's disapprobation and chagrin were tempered by the Commissioner's tacit intimation of a finesse in administration and adjustment that Bond as a novice had not yet mastered.

After Bond had altered Wendel's luncheon hour, Wendel, keenly alive to the delicate line of forebearance not be be passed with impunity, agreed to Bond's compromise that he make an apology in the presence of the other employes.

Wendel made it—in a tone that nullified every word he spoke.

Bond's smouldering resentment toward the Commissioner, who had made him swal-

low a bitter dose, betrayed itself in a strained manner, averted eyes and costive speech. The older man tried to convey to him a sympathetic understanding of his difficulties. His friendly nod implied: "You don't see it, youngster, but it must be done this way."

Meantime business and chance made passages between Bond and Marcella inevitable. Restrainedly Bond kept close to mere civilities and courtesies. To curtain her own lively interest in his every doing, Marcella followed a wilful perversity to scoff and mildly ridicule his earnestness. Once she appeared to make a long circuit in order to pass his way.

"Really, Mr. Bond, we mustn't look upon our job, particularly when it is a city job, so seriously. Take the advice of those who know, it doesn't pay."

"But, then, Miss Brent, I take all work seriously. I am afraid I take even play, recreation, seriously—too much planning and looking ahead. I suppose it's a bit early to ask where you are going for your summer rest."

"That question is never too early. I always have the same answer: hills, heights, mountains, somewhere above all this. I spend fifty weeks of the year wishing for it." She had dropped her tone of ironical banter and waved a wide compassing hand.

It was like a passage of their dream-talk echoing back to him. "Yes, peaks have a way of lifting us clear out of ourselves, of freeing us from the grubbing, nibbling concerns of every day."

Then, as if she had caught herself playing out of character: "Imagine, Mr. Bond, what the Civic Betterment Society would say if it could see you idling like this." Marcella laughed in feigned reproval and glided away.

Painstakingly Bond proceeded with the installation of new methods and policies in the Auditor's office, yet with slackened vim. Nevertheless he had a dogged determination to remain until light should be turned onto the darksome windings of non-partisan control. There was, too, the unplumbed reason of Marcella's metamorphosis.

The murmurings at Bond's housecleaning and adoptions were many but muffled. Wendel preserved his stolid air of unconcern and sharpened the discomforting laugh in eyes always tempted to play the other fellow for the fool. So far Bond had not been able to "show him."

Among other innovations Bond had hung a notice that all vouchers not cleared through the office within three days were to be brought to him with a satisfactory explanation of the delay. This was to obviate a suspicion that the clearing of vouchers had served as a basis for trading favors.

And now old Scott, head of the Acme Supply Company, had appeared with a complaint that a payment of $5,000 had been held up two weeks. Bond glowed at white heat. He sent for all vouchers awaiting clearance. He found that of the Acme Company among them. Bond's probing revealed that the voucher had lain on Wendel's desk for ten days. Wendel's evasion had been: "It was somehow caught under a batch of papers." Bond could find no key to the truth.

The whole matter seemed to have sunk into quiescence when one of Wendel's verbal thrusts sent a fellow clerk to Bond with illumination. Wendel had boasted that he could hold up a voucher a month without penalty.

Bond's mouth set in a firm, straight line. He promptly laid the particulars before the Commissioner in cold nudity, concluding, "I don't ask, I don't want drastic punishment but at least a deterrent, for unless you uphold me in this, Mr. Grant—well—" He flung out his hands in an accent of futility.

"My boy, we'll give you action in just a little while. Be patient. The expression the Commissioner turned on him held a significance that baffled Bond hopelessly. His former conviction that his superior was a man of honor and faith began to wobble.

Bond returned to his desk with a robust contempt for men who take office making promises of upheaval and a fresh start and then shy at shadows. His own plan of action was: Sight! Set! Fire! Strike!

Shilly-shallying was abhorrent to him. The Non-Partisans had been put in to clean things up, to salvage only so much of the old as was worth it and to install the new. Why the Commissioner should temporize with an employee so flagrantly intractable as Wendel was beyond Bond's figuring.

As they sat on the back porch of the boat club house, facing the river, Wendel had hinted to Marcella his purposed test of strength against Bond if only to jolt him out of his smug complacency. "I'll show that fellow his autocratic rules are not binding on me. I'll turn something off on him now and then and prove my innocence as pure as snow."

Marcella urged doubtfully: "But, after all, Phil, isn't he right? He is trying little by little to vitalize the whole routine, and no one knows better than you what a lifeless mess it was."

Wendel turned on her stormily. "Oh, the fellow's Sunday school bait has entrapped you, too—his pursuit of the good, the beautiful, the true. Don't be a fool, Marcella; his is only another way of playing the game."

Marcella was looking thoughtfully, wearily, at the placid flow of the river.

Wendel turned instantly repentent. He bent his head close to hers. "You shouldn't be mixed up in these affairs any way, and you won't be very much longer, if only you'll say the word."

Marcella's tone was flat. "Of course, I don't pretend not to know what you mean, Phil."

Wendel looked sharply around to make certain they were unheard. "No one but you will hear this from me. The big fellow has promised to make me Auditor. He hasn't told me how, but trust him not to talk fast. And then, little girl, I'll have enough to take care of you in comfort. You're going to let me?" He had gripped her wrist.

Marcella stood up hastily as if at the alarm of footsteps. Wendel released his grasp. She took his arm compensatingly. "You know, Phil, I told you the 'yes' will have to ring all through me, and it hasn't yet. I do like you, so much, but I should feel happier if you were in private employment. I agree there's a fascination about the political game—the unexpected turns, the clever windings, the protean manoeuvres, the surprising landings; but Phil, I am beginning to wonder whether it is worth while. After all, you count on plain trickery for half the winnings, and you have brains, you don't have to."

"Leave all these problems to me, little girl. Where would the captains of industry be if they had let the ethics of business trouble them?"

And she had lamented: "Phil, if you would only try to see."

While Bond waited somewhat sullenly for the Commissioner's promised action, there cropped up the permanent appointment of a new Auditor, the old one having found an opening in the period of grace allotted him. The Civil Service Committee held inflexibly to its ruling that the new appointee must be chosen after qualifying examination.

The applicants were Bond, reluctant to compete but strongly urged by the Commissioner; Wendel; half a dozen young accountants with civic aspirations; and five or six chronic pursuers of civil service prizes who could just nose in under the requirements. The real contest was between Bond and Wendel. Bond by reason of a varied experience and a capacity for grasping and classifying details, having already conquered the musty intricacies of the Auditor's office, was well primed. Wendel followed his usual complacent course, not erring in underrating Bond but in overrating the value of his own six years in the Auditor's office.

When the Civil Service Committee gave its ratings it was found that Bond stood first and Wendel third, both possible appointees.

Having undertaken the reorganization of the office Bond felt himself pledged to its completion, so that his acceptance of the appointment seemed inevitable.

Chastisement had not yet been meted out to Wendel, who, in spite of the published ratings, seemed to have acquired an added buoyancy, a fresh access of assurance, his toleration of Bond coming close to insolence. Bond decided to jog the Commis-

sioner's memory and to make his own acceptance of permanent appointment conditional on Wendel's punishment.

He called upon Miss Brent for a stenographer, a request that was straightway honored. Briefly, dispassionately, he formulated charges against Wendel and asked that he be disciplined.

Bond had just stepped outside his own door as Marcella came towards him, his letter affecting Wendel in her hand.

With a barbed smile she said: "For Mr. Bond, I believe." Going close to him she tore the letter lengthwise and thrice across. She handed the tatters to Bond and fled. A moment later she knew her action for the wilful expression of her blind rage against Wendel's petty revolt, against Bond for making Wendel appear ignoble by contrast. Bitterly she knew it for sheer untempered, unreasoning fury.

An hour later this fury burst full upon Phil, as, with a thrill of pride, he drew up beside her a few steps from the building.

"The Acme voucher trick is yours, Phil, I knew it from the first, though you neglected to tell me so outright. You are obstinately blind to the pettiness of such actions. You won't see that it makes you a small man, that it is unprincipled, dishonest."

His anger mounted like a rocket. "It's that hypocrite, Bond. I know it. He's caught you with his little game of civic virtue. Beautifully easy!"

After a severing glance Marcella spoke evenly. "Without a word, Phil, he has made me see and feel the wrong slant of carrying on things from your point of view, and from what I, too, had fallen into adopting as my point of view—it all seemed so adroit."

"Don't say any more, Marcella, don't try to explain it." Deep aching sadness throbbed in his speech. "Bond is the reason you would not say 'yes' to me."

"Oh, Phil, it's 'yes' if you want it so!" She turned ready to drench him with her tenderness, to sacrifice herself in the wish to ease his pain, to save his suffering.

After a reinforcing pause he spoke with quiet strength. "In a moment like this, Marcella, you would promise yourself to me and spend the rest of your days trying to live up to it. If you have come to think—well, differently of Bond than of me I don't suppose any of us can help it; but don't believe it's because you see him labeled Virtue and me something close to Vice. The reason lies leagues deeper."

As they came to the underground station their steps slowed in unison.

"And if it comes about, may he always deserve you, girl." Wendel held out his hand.

Marcella put her own within it and looked aside to choke back brimming tears for the man she had just missed loving.

Dumfounded, Bond had remained standing some seconds where Marcella had left him, still clinging to the torn bits of paper with one hand while the other reached for the back of his head. Marcella had broken through their protecting reserve crashingly. The girl was overwrought. Her interest in Wendel was undeniably keen.

How to deal with him now? He could not dictate another set of charges. He would take it up orally.

Conformable to this decision, Bond sauntered into the Commissioner's sanctum after office hours. That official was uncommonly gracious.

"Bond, I was about to go down to dig you out. Have a seat."

Bond took the waiting chair with customary cool expectancy.

The Commissioner swung around and hung his full gaze on Bond. "You may look for a change where you are in a day or two, my boy."

Bond faced him acutely interrogative; then, believing he read the other's meaning, he smiled his satisfaction. At last the Commissioner was going to act to sustain him. He eagerly turned to other affairs that he could now discuss with hope of co-operation.

Ardor in his work was temporarily suspended, awaiting the clearing of the air by the Commissioner's course in regard to Wendel. On the second day following it came.

It was toward closing hour that the Commissioner walked briskly into the main

room of the Auditing Division. He thrust his head inside Bond's nook.

"Bond, will you be good enough to turn over to Mr. Wendel the business of this division? His appointment as Auditor takes effect to-morrow."

Bond wheeled upon the Commissioner sternly askance. Then, mechanically he nodded in dull, uncomprehending assent as his left hand reached up and around.

The Commissioner turned to the men: "Gentlemen, Mr. Wendel, whom you know very well, is to be the new Auditor." Addressing Wendel: "And, Mr. Wendel, Mr. Bond is to fill the newly created office of Department Manager. You will report to him directly and carry on the affairs of the Auditing Division under his guidance."

Bond's eyelids rolled back full; his mouth twitched humorously. At the same time he saw Wendel's triumph, which had flickered up from a sodden depression bespoken in a slumping attitude of body and a dullness of the eyes, fade. He noted, too, the clearing faces of the men when they heard that Wendel's powers were to be wielded harmlessly under a strong brake.

Irresistibly Bond stepped back several paces and glanced to the left. Marcella, in search of the Commissioner for detailed instructions about the preparation of some peremptory notices, had entered unheard and waited just inside the doorway of Bond's room. Bond joined her.

A subdued, penitent Marcella held towards him a hesitating hand. "Will you let me say I am glad—and sorry—and so ashamed?"

Bond had taken her hand in a firm warm clasp. "Why go back to it? There's a kicking little savage in every one of us, and unless we take wonderful care once in a while he breaks loose and tears around until we catch him and leash him again."

Marcella now looked full at him. "It is very good of you to try to gloss over my unpardonable rudeness, but at that moment I meant to be offensive. I was stung with bitterness that Phil should lend himself to such pettiness, when I am sure even you know he is naturally finer than would appear from the things he sometimes does. You know he's my brother in everything but blood, and I was enraged that he should show up so badly beside you."

"Miss Brent, if Wendel were the only man under me I would extend forbearance a long way, but under the circumstances I was forced to halt him or confess the job too much for me." Bond tapped with the end of his pencil lightly on the wall. "And all this was really sisterly interest, Miss Brent?"

"I have come to know it was only that."

He persisted for clarity. "And not the kind of regard that would stand in the way of my calling you Marcella?"

Marcella's cheeks were toned as the peony. "Not if you very much wanted to." Whereupon she took flight, leaving Bond bewildered by the bounteous gift of fortune.

But about his delight was an outer coronal of mystery. What underlay the Commissioner's action? Bond dropped in to see Mr. Grant before leaving for the day. The two men sat facing each other for a moment; then both burst into a shout of relieving laughter.

"Commissioner, you move in hidden ways."

"Not when you know the mainsprings, Bond. Let me set you straight about this."

Thereupon the Commissioner admitted him to the sacred penetralia of the administration. Wendel was the pet of the boss of the Ring. He had set his heart on being Auditor. The Boss had promised that in spite of heaven and less celestial regions he should be. While the Non-Partisans had won the election they needed some minority support to carry through their biggest projects. The Ring, though badly twisted and dented, still held together. The Commissioner had made the appointment in a barter for votes on two measures—their only chance for success.

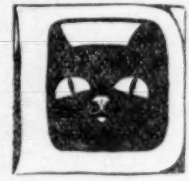
"So that the non-partisan office holder can not afford to be wholly reformer; an admixture of the politician is indispensable. It's the working blend of the two that wins—is that it, Commissioner?"

"Neatly put, Bond, and it tells the whole story."

THESPIS VERSUS MIDAS

By WILLARD BRADLEY

Old Simon Atkinson has oodles of money on tap all the time, just waiting for somebody to come along with a bung starter; but that doesn't mean that every check he writes is in danger of being honored by the paying teller.



DESPITE the fact that Bradstreet and Dun rated him well up in six figures, Old Simon Atkinson had his "place of business"—he detested the word "office"—up a flight of creaking, rickety stairs in an antiquated, spider-infested, structure, a stone's throw from New York's money mart.

It was here, in the blanketing shadow of a score of heaven-kissing, Brobdingnagian monuments to the great, golden god, Business, and within earshot of the obstreperous, garishly-garbed curb broker's satellites, that he conducted his various transactions. He dealt in everything (save souls) from real estate to inventions, and from discarded office furniture to old law-books, with the aid of a dilapidated, warped roll-top desk of the vintage of 1887, a stridulous swivel chair upon an arm of which some lovesick swain had carved an arrow-pierced heart, a pair of ordinary, straight-backed chairs in crying need of caning, a shabby, freckled, underpaid, underfed, lip-reading office boy named Alexander, a Maltese tomcat he had, in a facetious moment, labelled "Oscar," a pair of day-and-night marine binoculars and a time-worn, battered old ledger he called his "Bible."

Old Simon, looking a cross between one of Cruikshank's drawings of Mr. Dickens' Scrooge and a fourth-rate barnstormer's impersonation of Denman Thompson, sat reading that part of an old, yellowing volume called "The Discovery of America," wherein Queen Isabella hocks the royal jewels, when Alexander announced a visitor.

The caller, a sleek-looking individual who called himself "Mr. Lawrence Skiffington," was arrayed in a Prince Albert that had seen better days, a tight-fitting suit of Shepherd plaid, a checkered knockabout fedora, a cardinal cravat that served as a fitting background for a stone of surprising whiteness, gloves the color of a Messina lemon, suede spats over black-and-tan oxfords (Broadway camouflage) and black striped shirt and socks that instantly reminded one of a convict or a zebra. Garbed as he was, this sartorial stranger was as much a part of Longacre Square as its lights and as out-of-place off it as a swordfish in a New England spinster's trunk.

In his right hand, the beaubrummellish one carried a bottle of something, which was wrapped in a sheet of the worst of the Park Row "yellows."

Alexander, upon receiving a wink from Old Simon, gave Mr. Skiffington one of the superannuated chairs, and that gentleman lifted the tails of his frayed Prince Albert with his free hand and planted himself in it. Seeing his conspicuous caller seated, Old Simon reluctantly closed his book, though not forgetting to turn down the corner of his page, and swung around noisily in his swivel.

"Well, young man," Old Simon drawled in a cracked, pipey voice, "what can I do for you this fine afternoon in spring?"

Mr. Skiffington adjusted his cardinal cravat, removed his lemon-colored gloves, revealing ten nicotine-stained, ladylike fingers adorned with cheap, showy rings, cleared his throat and then replied:

"Mr. Atkinson, I understand that you are open to purchase anything that will show profit from a new stove-polish to a Chinese elephant?"

"Yes—if it'll show profit!" answered Old Simon, shrewdly.

"Well, if that's the case," asserted Mr. Skiffington, puffing up like a pouter pigeon, "I've brought you something that will make *millions* for you!"

Old Simon's spectacles jumped off his Napoleonic nose, Alexander swallowed his tutti-frutti, and Oscar turned a somersault on the floor.

Seeing that he had made the hoped-for "big impression," Mr. Skiffington continued.

"Yes, sir, it will make *millions* for you!"

The crafty old dealer placed his spectacles back on his nose and then asked his caller what "it" was.

Mr. Skiffington dramatically unwrapped the bottle of something he still carried in his right hand and placed it on top of Old Simon's warped desk.

"This is 'it!' The invention I have burned midnight oil and thousands of feet of illuminating gas trying to discover. The thing that has baffled the cleverest scientists in the universe for many years. The—"

At this highly interesting point in Mr. Skiffington's narrative, Old Simon, fast losing his easily-lost temper, "butted in."

"Young man, Phineas T. Barnum, were he alive, would envy your wonderful gift o' gab. Foisting white chimpanzees and seven-legged hyenas on an unsuspecting public would be quite easy with you around. But, getting down to earth and plain statements, what have you got in that confounded bottle that deserves all this Ciceronian display of eulogistical fireworks?"

Unabashed, and his soft collar still unwilted, Mr. Skiffington resumed.

"In this bottle is the eighth wonder of the world, the greatest discovery of the twentieth century, the accomplishment of the impossible, the marvelous, miraculous 'Skiffington's Crackerjack Sight Restorer!'"

Alexander snickered audibly, Oscar darted after a mouse that peeked into the room from a hole the size of a twenty-five cent piece in the corner, and Old Simon all but swallowed his Adam's apple.

"How does it work?" Old Simon asked, when he had regained his breath.

"Very simply, very simply!" replied the oratorical one. "By simply rubbing a little of the golden fluid contained in this bottle over the eyes of a man, woman or child afflicted with blindness, presto!—before one can say 'Raymond Hitchcock,' that selfsame man, woman or child can see!"

Old Simon helped himself to a horehound lozenge from a box on his desk, and then quizzed:

"How do you know?"

"By experiments, Mr. Atkinson, by experiments."

Old Simon looked hard at his visitor for fully thirty seconds, rubbing a stubby index finger up and down the bridge of his Napoleonic nose the while, and said:

"Mr. Skiffinton, the last 'Who's Who' gave my birthplace as St. Louey, Mizzoura." (He was born in the First Ward, but a few squares away). "I've been living in this vale o' tears for nigh onto sixty-seven years and have yet to witness the performing of a miracle. You'll have to show me!"

"Gladly, Mr. Atkinson, gladly!" immediately returned Mr. Skiffington, a triumphant gleam shining out of his owlish eyes.

"How are you going to do it?" Old Simon asked, a trifle surprised.

"Easy as eating strawberry shortcake. Have your office boy go out into the streets and bring in the first blind person he meets. Then, you'll see!"

Old Simon coughed into his blanched, bony fist and, after doing a little quick thinking, turned to Alexander and told him to do as Mr. Skiffington bade. Alexander, taking his cheap checkered cap from his coat pocket and, placing it on his tousled head, went out in search of a blind person, leaving Old Simon and Mr. Skiffington behind to talk about such interesting topics as the war, the weather and the influence of women in politics. Only they didn't. During Alexander's absence, Old Simon busied himself with polishing his spectacles while Mr. Skiffington tried in vain to get the attention of a cute little titian-haired stenographer in an office across the street.

In less than five minutes, Alexander returned with a man encumbered with a sign advertising his affliction, a bundle of multicolored pencils and a battered tin cup.

Perceiving that Old Simon looked surprised at his quick and successful return, Alexander thought an explanation would not be amiss.

"I found him a short ways up the street!"

Mr. Skiffington surrendered his chair to his blind brother and then, after the fashion of certain physicians, removed his Prince Albert, draped it gently across the back of Old Simon's swivel chair, and then rolled up his sleeves. After removing the blind man's blue smoked spectacles, and some intense pantomime, he began to apply the golden fluid to the unseeing one's closed lids. After a second or so, the lids began to flutter. In another second, they were up, and the blind man's eye-balls were visible.

Realizing that he could again see, the quondam blind man threw his arms around his savior's neck and, in Monte Cristo fashion, shouted brokenly:

"I—can—see! I—can—see! Oh, my friend, how will I ever be able to repay you! Oh, my dear, sweet, little Rosie! Now, I will be able to see your dear, sweet, little face for the first time! Rosie, Rosie, I can see! I—can—see!"

Tongue-lolled and pop-eyed, Alexander looked on at the performance of this dramatic miracle; but, at that moment, Old Simon was helping himself to another lozenge.

Mr. Skiffington gently released himself from the grateful man's embrace and, with a gesture a la Sir Henry Irving, said:

"That's all right, my friend, that's all right! The pleasure I receive from helping a suffering fellow-man repays me a hundred fold! Go to your little Rosie and may God bless you both!"

The grateful man kissed the sleeve of Mr. Skiffington's coat of Shepherd plaid and then silently departed, a prayer on his lips, his "Please Help the Blind" sign still hung round his neck, his hands still holding his multicolored pencils and battered tin cup and his blue smoked spectacles peeking out of a tattered coat pocket along with a rather new-looking red bandana!

As soon as the former sightless one's feet led him down the creaking steps of the hushed old building and into the roar of Broad Street, Mr. Skiffington turned to Old Simon.

"Are you convinced, Mr. Atkinson?"

Old Simon evaded Mr. Skiffington's query and answered it by asking:

"How much will you take for your restorer?"

"Five thousand dollars!" answered Mr. Skiffington.

Old Simon balked at the amount requested and then blew his Napoleonic nose. Then he began to rub his baldpate and whistle "The Merry Widow Waltz." Then he became strangely silent, a merry twinkle in his crafty eyes.

"I'll give you thirty-seven hundred dollars, not a cent more!" he said finally.

Mr. Skiffington hemmed and hawed for a few minutes—the high cost of food and fuel being his reasons—and ultimately agreed to accept Old Simon's offer.

Old Simon produced a check-book from the bottom drawer of his roll-top—he had no safe—and began to indulge in some chirographic gymnastics. He dried what he had written with the aid of a cheap green blotter that told all about the wonderful meals served at Ignatz's Arm-Chair Eatery around the corner. Then, tearing the check out of the book and holding it aloft, he said:

"Young man, you will get this, when I get the formula of your restorer!"

This last was a part of the transaction Mr. Skiffington evidently had not taken into account.

"Formula? Er—yes, why, of course! Of course, you shall have the formula. I never thought of that! Yes, yes, of course! The original was accidentally destroyed by my little Wilbert the other day when he lit the lamp of his magic lantern with it. I'll write out another one!"

Mr. Skiffington grabbed a small scratch pad and an indelible pencil from Old Simon's desk and hurriedly began to scribble something about nitroglycerine, ipecac and bitartrate. When he had

finished, he tore off what he had written and handed it to Old Simon.

"Here is the formula!" he asserted like some monarch of old upon handing the key of the drawbridge to one of his vassals.

Old Simon took it from Mr. Skiffington's beringed, nicotine-stained fingers and perused it carefully. Then he gave the check to the sartorial one, who thanked Old Simon profusely, bowed a bow worthy of Chesterfield, opened the door, closed it and was gone.

Old Simon then returned the check-book to its place in the bottom drawer of his roll-top and resumed his attack on "The Discovery of America."

Alexander, who had been drinking in the whole contingency, tiptoed over to Old Simon's desk and noiselessly removed a small leathern case from the top drawer. Out of this he took a pair of day-and-night marine binoculars, and going to the window, he focussed them on two gentlemen standing in a shaft of golden sunlight in the distance and holding an extremely happy conversation.

Alexander studied their lips and read: "How much did you get?"

"Thirty-seven hundred!"

"Yea bo! Eighteen hundred and fifty each!"

"Pretty good for a ten-cent bottle of cream soda and a formula not worth half a hoot in Hades, eh what?"

And then two gentlemen winked meaningly at each other, turned the corner and were lost to the lip-reading Alexander's sight.

Alexander turned excitedly to Old Simon and breathlessly exclaimed:

"Mr. Atkinson, you'd better have that check stopped! The bank closes in fifteen minutes! The formula is a fake and the stuff in the bottle is nothing but cream soda!"

Without looking up from his book, Old Simon replied:

"That's all right, Alexander. If that gentleman hadn't been so gosh-dinged anxious to get off with that check, he would have noticed that it was dated 'October 12, 1492' and was signed by Christopher Columbus!"

BUTTERFLY TOM and Clarence, who made their debut in THE LAW OF THE WOLF, the prize winning story for June, will appear again in the October number. They forsake the clam flats of Seattle for the open road. They are as hungry as ever and broke as usual. They get work on a hog ranch and join the church, and Clarence is chosen choir leader. Everything looks rosy, especially the "three squares a day;" but Clarence starts to skid, and before he can recover himself the clam flats loom up again. Look for A PRIMADON OF THE PIGS *by Chart Pitt.*

CHARYBDIS WITHOUT SCYLLA

By P. CASPAR HARVEY

This tale is an up-to-date variation of Frank Stockton's famous story "The Lady or the Tiger?" which was published more than twenty-five years ago in the Century.

IERRE had been a prisoner working in a German munition factory for eleven days before the chance came to make the request.

"I had almost finished reading 'The Lady or the Tiger?' by Frank R. Stockton, when ordered into instant action. The broadsheet upon which it was printed was taken from me when I was captured. Would it be asking too much to permit me to finish that story?"

"Memorandum of your petition will be sent to headquarters," the functionary replied.

Eight days later the superintendent of the plant explained to Pierre:

"From your home village your sister and your sweetheart have been brought here and the entire story read to them. Two tabernacles exactly alike are being built now at the edge of the wood. In one will rest a firing squad; in the other will wait a German officer. This afternoon you will be taken within one hundred paces of the two tabernacles. All prisoners at this center will be marched to the field. Your sister and sweetheart will be brought ten paces in front of you.

"Your sweetheart will then advance across the field to open whichever portal she chooses. She shall be guided by no other agency, as the story says, than 'her free choice and an impartial and incorruptible chance.' No one among those present will know behind which is the officer or which the death squad.

"If she open the one, the firing squad will appear. She shall die at the instant the last word is spoken by him who will read to you the last of the Stockton story. Your sister shall by the same act be adjudged 'not guilty.' She is charged with murdering her two-weeks-old infant, and pleads that its father was a German soldier and she a non-consenting mother. If your sweetheart opens the other portal there will come forth an officer, who is to become the father of a child she shall bear the Fatherland, and the firing squad will kill your sister, adjudged by the same act as 'guilty.'"

It was a dreary, cloudy day. Not a ray of sunshine had shone for days.

Pierre was led out to the field at the appointed hour.

His position was at the north side. The two tabernacles were directly opposite. They were constructed partly of fresh boughs and partly of what seemed to Pierre to be discarded tenting material. The tabernacles were identical.

The sun came out for a fleeting moment.

A bugle sounded. Marie and Arsena were placed before him.

Pierre's eyes had been intent upon the tabernacles. The sun shone in the west for but one swift minute. But his watchfulness had been rewarded. He detected a faint, but distinct movement of shadows in opposite directions through almost the length of the shade cast by one of the tabernacles.

Pierre knew in which tabernacle there was more than one person.

World famed efficiency failed to take into account the place in the sun these tabernacles might occupy.

Marie looked into the face of her lover.

Arsena stood expectant.

With calm assurance Pierre inclined his head to the left.

The French woman started toward the

tabernacles with easy, confident step. She went dircctly to the one on the left and raised the latch, certain Pierre had not erred.

An orderly finished reading to Pierre the last of Stockton's story.

The Black Cat Club

THE LAW OF THE WOLF by Chart Pitt was the prize winning story for June. Prizes for criticisms were awarded to the following members: Mrs. John R. Powell, St. Louis, Mo.; Pendleton P. Karr, Washington, D. C.; W. A. Sternberg, Tacoma, Wash.; N. Henry Seaburg, Boston, Mass.; E. A. Kirkwood, San Francisco, Cal.; Henry D. Muir, Chicago, Ills.; Miss Harriette Wilbur, Duluth, Minn.; Maurice Baum, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Miss Lydia J. Trowbridge, Winnetka, Ills. Stories are criticised in the order of the standing in the contest. The review is not the wo k of Mrs. Powell, and in no instance is a criticism the work of one member. The whole is a patched up affair, a sort of literary afghan to which others besides the prize winners have contributed "squares." The club is an open forum for the discussion of BLACK CAT stories. Many who do not win prizes contribute much interesting comment to the discussion. It is therefore not necessary to be a prize winner to be heard, although it is necessary to be a prize winner to have one's name printed at the top of the column. The editors cannot undertake to give credit for every criticism quoted, and make this explanation for the benefit of members who are not familiar with the method of compiling the review and to correct the impression that the winner of the first prize is the author.

The Law of the Wolf is a much better story in every way than the last one by the same author. It opens with even more promise, and, unlike the other, fulfills that promise. Though the characters are quite unlovely, the author has not failed to make clear the relation between cause and effect in the deterioration of the two mountain men, doomed, by the father's dream of a butterfly life in the city, to eke out a miserable existence on the clam flats. The father, even in yielding to the temptation to sell his son's services to the whale ship, is still capable of regret and of almost tender solicitude for the son's probable extremity of hunger, which makes him forego the satisfaction of his own appetite with the first dollar of his blood money and carry provisions back to the camp. His parental love is still there, even if the human wolves have feasted on his innocence. But at no time does the boy show any compunction for anything that he does, and one is glad in the end that he is caught in his own scheme to do just what the father was doing. The climax of the story is obvious to the most lazy-minded reader very early, but the interest is sustained all along, nevertheless, for the very simplicity of the outline may admit of a choice of endings.

The Bishop of the Street is a business fable, founded on a well gnown and oft repeated incident in the busy life of Wall Street. It opens in the theoretically correct manner by a neat description of the setting, by introducing the hero of the story, by bringing the reader's attention to the focal point, by using a celebrated figure of Wall Street to camouflage the real attack of the author. The use of the Bishop is accomplished with a light and delicate touch, and the reference to him in the end, rounds out the story well, and links together the various incidents connecting the highly imaginative society for the improvement of business ethics, occurring in the dream of Marcellus. A dream story savors somewhat of high school days, but its development here holds one's interest on edge until the salutation of palms places the occurrence beyond reason and in the shadowy land of after-luncheon reverie. With all its faults, and it has a few, it is a compelling story, rich in substance and devoid of the affected elegance and dilettanteism so marked in some recent stories by the same author.

The Dagger is a mixture of good and bad work, of much that is unique and much that is commonplace. It almost seems as though the author realizes that he has attempted something too ambitious and tries to makes the weight of his style carry the burden. The plot is highly artificial; one would not expect such things to happen, but by careful planning the author accounts for everything except Hugh's disposition of Jim. Hugh's jealousy of his brother is not without foundation, and even with the dagger destroyed Jim remains a menace. In building up a good case for the dagger, the author creates Jim, and in the end Jim threatens to be more troublesome than the dagger—the way with minor characters who run amuck. The lengthy exposition does not, by postponing the crisis, make it more effective. The frequent change of scene and shift of viewpoint are disconcerting.

In His Boots is something of a disappointment because the author does not have the courage to let it end pathetically. Kid Caperton is a pathetic character, but

he carries little conviction. Still one could accept him and his motive in becoming a bandit readily enough, if he played the game single handed. Properly speaking he does that, or is supposed to, so far as he knows; yet when he appears at the window while the sheriff and Uncle Bill are discussing his case he seems to have perfect confidence in the sheriff, which he could hardly have unless he was "in" on the sheriff's co-operation. The plot conflicts too much, and the climax borders on the rank sentimentality of the old school movie story. The story has the atmosphere of a true bandit story but without being genuine and therefore unconvincing. Of action and incident it has plenty but of an anecdotal rather than dramatic character.

Heckby's Bit has all the merits and some of the defects of oral composition—of the story told rather than written. Such a story often gains in spontaneity what it sacrifices in the way of workmanship. The opening paragraph discloses the fact that Heckby is a fisherman and that his calling enunciates a rather sensible philosophy of life. He is described by contrasts and contradictions, but none of these deceives the reader. Whatever he puts his mind to he does with a singleness of purpose and a devotion worthy of the crown of a martyr. His fishing is a pastime, a passion, and a profession, yet one is scarcely surprised when he shows the born fisherman's patience and persistence in a new line. The story cannot be ranked high as judged from the critical standpoint of short-story writing, due perhaps to its improbability. Still the very improbable and unique philosophy on the part of Heckby is really the meat of the story. The whimsical nature of the old man furnishes the humorous strain which throws life into it. If it cannot be called great, it can at least be put down as entertaining.

To Keep Out the Frost is a dramatic yarn of three converging trails, with plenty of action and interest. There is not much in the way of characterization, but the story portrays a great deal of the instincts and sagacity of both man and beast in its brief length. It has good qualities lacking in *Some Joke*, but the shifting viewpoint still bothers the author. The story could be materially improved by telling it entirely from the angle of Big Ben. Jim Hendry might be maintained throughout as "the menace;" the language could be appropriately sustained, as in "the shining black thing that bit little red agony holes;" and the story really ought to reveal Hendry's state of mind only at the very end, where he leaves Big Ben a whole skin, a monument of stones, and the real dignity of death. In order to raise the story above the commonplace the author has sought to invest it with sentimentalism; but one wonders if Jim Hendry would pass up such a pelt as Big Ben's for such a sentimental reason as keeping out the frost of ingratitude. If Big Ben had been only slightly wounded and at the mercy of Hendry's gun, it might be reasonable to suppose that Hendry would allow him to escape. But of what use is a pelt to a dead bear? The average Jim Hendry would have skinned the bear without compunction and would have, in later years, pointed at the pelt with pride and related how that same bear had saved Willie Boy's life.

Miss Betty breathes occultism, from the time when Jedediah's mother says, "Yes, I know," until Jedediah says "Betty." In the opening paragraphs, the force which impels the boy toward the sea may be explained by heredity, or the influence of environment; but the plot is based on a force that goes unexplained, probably for the lack of an explanation, and leaves the reader with the impression that he has been regaled with a groundless superstition of the sea. Its appeal would have been stronger if Betty and Jedediah had met, loved and parted, and in the moment of impending death her anguished thoughts had telepathically traversed the void and called him to the rescue.

Oft in the Stilly Night is one of those standardized stories of homely village jurisprudence. And it runs true to form in every particular. It is burdened with too many characters and scattered incidents. One knows that the country lawyer is going to outwit his city brother, and even feels certain that he is going to do it through some sentimental appeal, using the medium of Miss Abigail's voice. But the story is saved from being altogether too obvious, and the critic is disarmed at the end, by the consistency with which the author makes "Our Billy" achieve his purpose, without really taking into his confidence a single human being, even the man who takes the final trick by innocently playing Miss Abigail's nursing song and denying all incriminating knowledge of a man called Tom Moore. Of course the judge's ruling in the case is absurd, but that doesn't matter, except to make the story possible. Terry's voluntary confession, although subsequent to the verdict and not in the evidence, is useful in squelching any further proceedings by Smoot, so the author is justified in injecting it into the proceedings.

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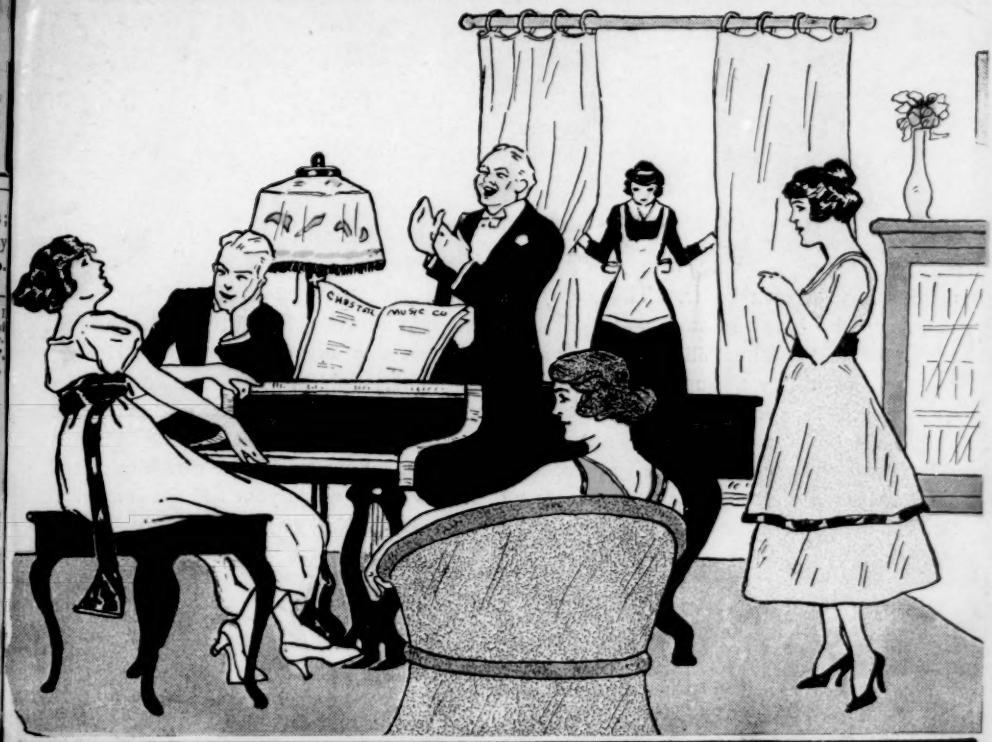
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